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Bayan Botanical Garden, a man-made 'rainforest'

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Local

Donating an organ, blood or money can save lives



JUST KIDDIN', SERIOUSLY

By Sahar Moussa

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Have you or a family member ever been in a situation where a donation of an organ, blood, or even money has saved your life? Lebanese philosopher and poet Gibran Kahlil Gibran said, "You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give." To be honest, I did not know how important donation is until my father was hospitalized in Lebanon - and he needed blood urgently. It was because of family members and strangers that my father's life was saved, and for this, I will always be grateful.

In Islam, donating money to charity is considered a great virtue. Not only money, even a very small act of kindness can be considered a charity. Prophet Mohamed (PBUH) said, "Your smile to your brother is a charity. Your removal of stones, thorns or bones from the paths of people is a charity. To act justly between two people is a charity. To help a man with his mount, lifting him onto it or hoisting up his belongings onto it, is a charity and a good word is a charity." (Al-Bukhari, Muslim)

As for organ donation, it is a 'special gift' to help another person who needs a transplant to live. One organ donor can save up to eight lives. In my opinion, organ donation is the greatest gift; it is selfless, noble and self-sacrifice anyone can give whether they are alive or dead. An organ could be someone's missing piece. When you die, your organs could help someone to stay alive.

Kuwait's law prohibits the trafficking of human organs, but allows free organ donation. Organ transplant is a very successful treatment for patients with end-stage organ failure. However, it does rely on human compassion. In the past two decades, Muslim scholars from around the world have convened to discuss the permissibility of organ donation. Most sharia councils have concluded that organ donation is allowed, and indeed recommended in Islam. Most scholars hold the opinion that organ donation is permissible given the following conditions:

1. The donor is not harmed by the donation.
2. The recipient requires the organ in order to live or to perform an essential function.
3. The donor's body, whether living or dead, is respected and treated with dignity.
4. The donor gives his or her organs freely.
5. The organs are not bought or sold.

I personally believe that everybody has an obligation towards one another and people should stand by each other and help in any way they can. In any donation, be sure that it is serving justice, balance and kindness for the good of the society.

If you are willing to be an organ donor, you can go to Kuwait Transplant Society in Al-Rawdah, Block 3, Abu Hayan Al-Tawhidi Street, Avenue 37, House 18. There, you can fill in the membership donation form and pick up the donation card at the same time. For more information, you can contact the association on the following numbers:

+965/22520147
+965/22520230
+965/ 50809482

We should know by now that every individual's act matters, and if you decide to become a registered organ donor, know that by doing so, you can make a huge impact, a big difference and most importantly, you can save lives.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Vintage vehicles on display at the Marina Crescent in this file photo. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Why are you still against vaccine?



IN MY VIEW

By Nawara Fattahova

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I was wrong. The one-year period of vaccinations against COVID-19 proved that vaccination is the only way to combat the pandemic. The high percentage of vaccination in the GCC countries, which exceeded 90 percent, was behind the sharp drop in coronavirus cases.

In Kuwait, the number of cases has dropped to less than 20 people per day, and there have been no deaths for most days since last October, when the vaccination rate exceeded 80%. The numbers have been visibly dropping since August, when almost 70 percent of people were vaccinated. On October 20, 2021, we finally entered the fifth phase of getting back to normal life.

On the other hand, Europe is again facing a high number of COVID-19 cases daily. Some countries (Austria, Russia, and others) even registered a record number of cases - just like at the beginning of the pandemic last year. According to their health officials, this is mainly due to the low vaccination rate as many people are refusing to take the vaccine. These countries have started imposing the lockdowns again.

Even with the clear results, many people still don't want to be vaccinated. The procedure the Kuwait authorities imposed at the beginning of this summer -

banning the non-vaccinated from travelling and even entering malls and other public places - is a model for many other countries, including Austria.

When the vaccination process started last December, I was one of the opponents of the vaccination drive. At that time, I believed that the period of time during which the tests were conducted on the vaccine was very short. I thought that a few months of examinations would not be enough to know the side effects of the vaccine. I know that my natural immunity is very high, and I rarely get sick - so why will I inject strange substances into my body?

For the first four or five months, I didn't register. I only registered after they announced that only vaccinated people would be allowed to travel. I also felt somehow safe after I saw millions across the globe getting vaccinated - and even in Kuwait, the number exceeded 1 million at that time.

I can't understand why people still reject the COVID vaccine after this long period, even when over 50 percent of the world population has been vaccinated. Some people still believe in the conspiracy theory, while others spread rumors about doctors, claiming that the vaccine is harmful and could cause death after a few years. How can anybody believe this?

Unfortunately, one of my friends is still refusing to get vaccinated. She said it doesn't bother her even if she doesn't travel or go to restaurants, theaters, or shopping malls. We also see a small group of people gathering at Iradah Square (once in a while) to protest against getting vaccinated. I wonder how long they can resist the jab and return to their usual life activities, especially travelling.

Every day is Friday



KAFFEKLATSCH

By Shaker Reshamwala

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So-called 'Black Friday', the day following American Thanksgiving, is the busiest shopping day in the US. Thanksgiving in the US is celebrated on the last Thursday of November, and on Friday, retailers offer aggressive discounts to herald the start of the Christmas shopping season. For decades, Black Friday was a mostly American affair, but in the past few years, the phenomenon has spread around the world, mostly coinciding with the dawn of the digital age.

Can Kuwait - where shopping is a national pastime - be left behind? Retailers in the country have embraced this shopping frenzy with gusto, with the entire month of

November devoted to seemingly unbeatable deals, especially after retailers in China came up with Singles' Day on Nov 11 (11.11), which is now the world's biggest shopping day.

But since black is seen as a color of mourning and sorrow, and Friday being an Islamic day of worship and rest, 'Black Friday' is rarely used in Kuwait and the wider region. Instead, you have White Friday, Blue Friday and Yellow Friday, while other sellers are holding Super Friday and even Meat Friday sales. One retailer is touting White Wednesday offers, while another has branded the entirety of November as Yellow Month.

Not that consumers in Kuwait need any excuse to hit the malls - these are the places to be. In the scorching heat of the summer, malls are an air-conditioned respite, while in the long nights of winter, their bright lights offer a warm welcome. In Kuwait, shopping centers are major touristic destinations in their own right. From traditional old souqs to gargantuan malls, visitors can spend the entire day shopping, dining or simply hanging out with friends and family.

So it's no wonder businesses are leaving no stone unturned to attract this footfall. Competition is fierce, with supermarkets releasing new flyers every Wednesday with hundreds of discounted products. There are apps that aggregate all these circulars so that shoppers can compare prices and compile shopping lists from the comfort of their homes. No time to go to the store? No problem, as online shopping is a click away, with a variety of payment and delivery options.

But retailers must choose their loss leaders wisely, as a difference of a few fils can determine where people will make a beeline for. In Kuwait's cutthroat market, consumers are very discerning and extremely smart. For most everyday products, there is no brand or store loyalty - only those vendors offering the cheapest prices and biggest discounts are likely to win the patronage of buyers. To stay in the black, a few November Fridays of various hues are just not enough for most retailers. The show must go on the entire year.

Zain continues to support efforts to end violence against women

Company lights up headquarters in orange for 2nd consecutive year

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, continues its support to the United Nations Secretary-General's UNiTE by 2030 to End Violence against Women campaign (UNiTE Campaign). The initiative calls for global action to increase awareness, galvanize advocacy efforts, and share knowledge and innovations to address violence against women and girls around the world.

Zain's contribution to this global campaign comes as a continuation of its collaboration with local and international organizations, including the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development and the UN Women Regional Office for Arab States. This joint effort reflects Zain's commitment to support initiatives and programs that shed light on the importance of protecting and empowering women, as well as those that enrich gender equality and inclusion within communities and workplaces.

Zain expressed its pride in being one of the Kuwaiti private sector's national entities that represent the nation in this campaign. For the second year running, the company has lit up its main headquarter buildings at Shuwaikh in orange along with the country's public and private sector organizations to demonstrate Kuwait's role and efforts in advocating this cause.

Zain is proud to be a part of the State of Kuwait's participation to support this global initiative by the United Nations, a contribu-

tion that seeks to find viable solutions to end violence against women, as this issue continues to have a worrying impact on many women and girls in Arab communities and around the entire world.

The goals of this campaign are well consistent with those of Zain's group-wide sustainability strategy. The company's efforts also come in line with its commitment to take part in social campaigns that aim at protecting and enhancing the overall social welfare of Arab communities in particular, and the world as a whole. This is especially true when it comes to issues related to protecting women and their rights.

Around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated key risk factors for violence against women and girls, such as unemployment, economic insecurity, and school closures. Under the leadership of the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, the United Nations Secretary-General's UNiTE by 2030 to End Violence against Women campaign (UNiTE Campaign), calls for global action to increase awareness, galvanize advocacy efforts and share knowledge and innovations. Governments, civil society, women's organizations, young people, the private sector, the media, and the UN system join forces to address the global pandemic of violence against women and girls.

Companies that have committed to the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), including Zain, recognize the important role



of the private sector to support efforts to end violence against women. Sexual harassment and violence incur high costs to women in terms of lost earnings, missed career advancement and overall wellbeing. On the other hand, companies are impacted by employee absenteeism and productivity losses.

Employers' investment in prevention and response to violence against women, includ-

ing domestic violence, is not only the right thing to do, but also the smart thing to do. Zain is keen on actively participating in the various local and regional projects that aim at contributing to the achievement of the country's various developmental goals. The company will spare no efforts to support any entity that serves the global sustainable goals and contributes to the progress and prosperity of the region.

Bayan Botanical Garden, a man-made 'rainforest'

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Kuwait Times was invited once again by a group of Kuwaiti photographer headed by Muhammad Al-Hudhud to come along with them to tour a glasshouse where the man-made 'rainforest' was placed. The Bayan Botanical Garden is not exactly a rainforest, but you could be easily forgiven for mistaking it for such - with its wide variety of exotic plants.

A plant sanctuary located inside Bayan Palace, it is open to the public every Thursday (from 9 am to 1 pm) and offers the perfect escape from

Kuwait's urban jungle. To enter, you must present your civil ID and take a visitor's badge, which you should wear during your tour of the garden. After passing through the lobby, you enter into a broad open space with water installations and lovely patches of green grass.

Photos with your phone camera are permitted. The moment you enter the glasshouse, you'll immediately feel the refreshing and colorful environment surrounding you. On the left are plants - native to the tropical environment, while on the right of the greenhouse are plants native to hot-





ter areas. In the tropical section, various types of tropical plants and flowers are artistically displayed from palm to banana trees to ferns and wild orchids to flowering trees.

The sound of water fountains provides soothing background music. In the water plants section, there are lilies and native plants that need lots of water to thrive. The entire display can be covered within 30 minutes, but if you are the type of person who talks to plants, even four hours will not be enough for you. The plants are well-maintained and the gardeners are more than happy to take pictures of you inside the garden.

Officially opened in Feb 24, 2015, the special botanical glasshouse - with various climatic zones, was inaugurated by HH the Amir. Various ministers and high-ranking government officials also attended the opening ceremony. The garden is located at Bayan Palace and occupies an area of 15,793 sq m. Almost 3,500 sq m of space is devoted to the cultivation of various exotic plants in the glasshouse. Despite high temperatures, the indoor climate is carefully controlled.



New rules as camping season kicks off

By Nawara Fattahova

The most significant change that pleased the campers was the slash in the price of insurance deposit when registering to get a camping location. The deposit this year is KD 300 instead of KD 500, which was imposed few years back. The camper also pays KD 50 fee, which is not refundable. The camping season is set for November 15, 2021 till March 15, 2022.

Few years back, after noticing the great damage to the desert environment and the negative effect on wildlife due to the wastes and leftovers by campers, the government decided to regulate it by setting certain areas for camping, with previous booking of each location through a mapping system. Also campers are required to pay a deposit, which will be refunded after removing his/her camp, to ensure that he cleaned the location.

Kuwait Municipality published the conditions and rules for camping on their official website: <https://www.baladia.gov.kw/>. The camper should be over 21 years old. Each person can only have one license in his name. The camping license is temporary and the Municipality can cancel it or change its location.

Camping location should be chosen from the locations set by the Municipality. The camper is obliged to inform the Municipality of the evacuation of the licensed site within the period of his license. He will be refunded the KD 300 deposit after issuing a certificate from the Environment Public Authority proving that the camp location was cleaned.

The rules include leaving a 100-meter distance between each camp, respecting traffic rules, following safety precautions by the fire department as regards to using fireworks; throwing waste or burning it or landfill; staying away from military locations by at least 2 km, staying away from high voltage lines by at least 100 meters; staying away from oil utilities, fuel stations, and natural protectorates by at least 500 meters; avoid damaging natural environment and wildlife; not establishing a fixed facility with build-



ing construction materials or to make any excavation in the ground, and to remove the camp at the end of the camping.

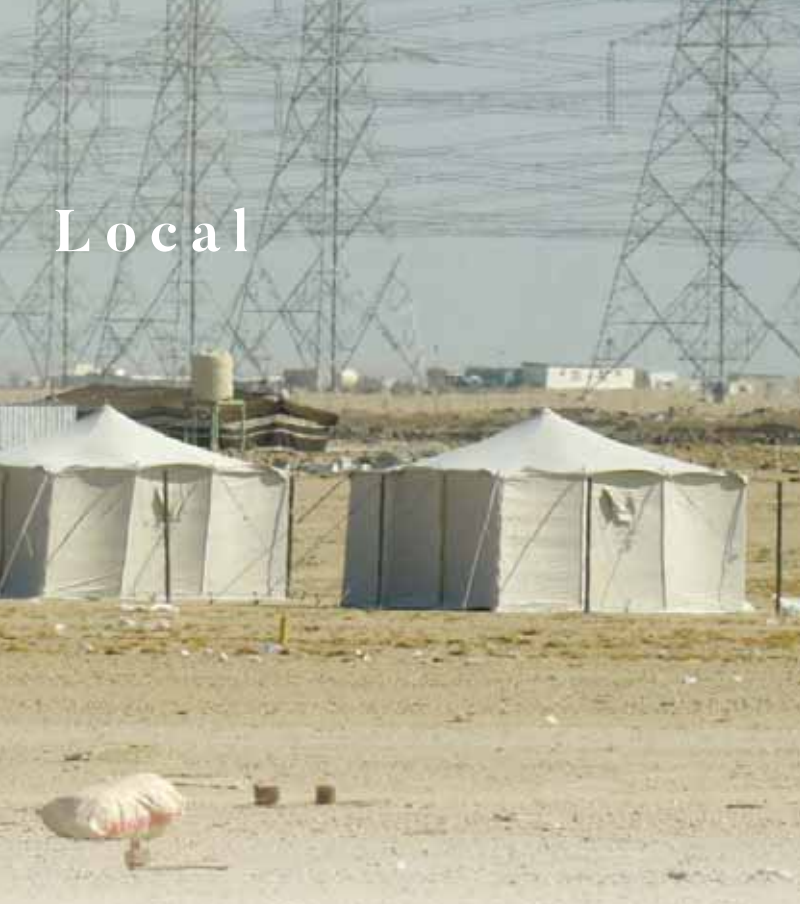
Camping conditions for companies and institutions are also included. The space of the camp should be between 2,000-5,000 square meters. The license will be canceled if the location is changed after registration, yet the Municipality has the right to change the location. They are also required to respect all other conditions applying for the individual camping. If the campers don't remove the camp, then the Municipality will do so on the camper's expense and he won't be allowed to set a

camp for up to three years. The campers can also find a map of the locations for setting the camp or caravan. The areas include: Subiya, Khathma, Mutla'a, Jahra, Al Noori, Um Safaq, Kabd, Zour, and Salmi.

With regards to fines and penalties for the violators who may set a camp without getting a permission from the Municipality after paying the deposit, a Municipality staff said that inspectors will place a warning to remove the camp, and if the camper doesn't remove the violating camp, it will be removed by the Municipality, and the camper will face legal actions.



Local



On the occasion of the

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Kuwait records 21 new COVID cases, no deaths

Saudi reports one COVID-19 death, 34 infections

Kuwait fully committed to DoC

KUWAIT: Minister of Oil and Minister of Higher Education Dr Muhammad Al-Faris reaffirmed Kuwait's support to the Declaration of Cooperation (DoC) reached by OPEC and non-OPEC oil producing countries in late 2016. Kuwait is open about the consultations to be held during the upcoming meeting of the OPEC+ alliance, he affirmed in a press release from the Ministry of Oil. Minister Al-Faris will take part in the 35th Meeting of the Joint OPEC-Non-OPEC Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMCM), the 182nd OPEC ministerial meeting and the 23rd meeting of the OPEC+ alliance in early December.

The State of Kuwait has yet to adopt a specific stance on these important events since there is no specific tendency from the OPEC+ alliance, according to the statement. The OPEC+ alliance consultations help coordinate the stances of the member countries, in the framework of the landmark DoC, in order to maintain stability of the global oil market, it said, affirming Kuwait's support to this collective effort.

'Reasonable levels'

Meanwhile, the head of the International Energy Agency has called on OPEC and its allies to take measures to help bring oil prices down to "reasonable levels". "I very much hope to see in the next meeting or meetings they... make the necessary steps in order to comfort the global oil markets and help bring the prices down at reasonable levels," Fatih Birol told reporters.

The head of the IEA, which unites oil consuming nations, also took aim at Russia over gas. "Russia can easily increase exports to Europe about 15 percent... and significantly comfort the European gas markets," said Birol. Natural gas prices in Europe have surged this year and Russia, the region's major supplier, has been slow to step up deliveries.

OPEC nations and their allies, including Russia, agreed in July to slowly increase their oil output each month towards pre-pandemic levels as the world economy recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic. They have declined to move faster despite a jump in prices to over \$80 per barrel, a level that many analysts worry could undermine the global economic recovery. They are due to review their strategy at a meeting in December.

'Hypocritical'

The United States and a handful of other oil consuming nations announced on Tuesday releases of supplies from their strategic petroleum reserves. The move is aimed at blunting soaring prices at the pump that are biting into consumers' pocketbooks and pushing up transportation costs. "The rise in oil prices is placing a burden on consumers in these countries and also in several emerging countries," Birol said. "It also puts additional pressure on inflation in a period where economic recovery remains uneven and still faces a number of risks," he added.

Inflation is pushing central banks towards raising interest rates, a move which would slow the global economic recovery as well as dent oil demand. Global crude prices rose following the announcement of the releases from strategic reserves as the move was less ambitious than anticipated. Birol added the releases were not a collective response by IEA members, which he said have happened only three times due to major supply shocks like the 1991 Gulf War, Hurricane Katrina and the Libyan civil war.—Agencies

KUWAIT: Kuwait's health ministry said that 21 people tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 24 hours, taking the caseload to 413,198. No deaths of the virus were reported within the same period, keeping the death toll at 2,465, the Ministry's spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said. Total recoveries rose by 25 to 410,496, he added. There are 237 patients receiving treatment at hospitals, in addition to 12 others at COVID-19 wards, he noted, pointing out that ICUs are currently clear from COVID-related cases. Medical swabs conducted over the same period reached 16,241, increasing the total tests to 5.2 million, he stated.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia reported one coronavirus death and 34 infections. According to the Saudi Health Ministry's daily report, the tallies of deaths and infections hit 8,828 and 549,950 respectively. The number of recoveries hit 538,702 with the addition of 30 case, added the report.

UAE reports single death

In another development, the United Arab Emirates logged yesterday, 77 new coronavirus infections. The Ministry of Health and Pre-

vention mentioned in press statement that total infections reached 741,720 whereas total deaths amounted to 2,145. The statement added that 88 recoveries were recorded, taking the total up to 736,511.

Qatar infections

Qatar Health Ministry announced yesterday 155 new confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the last 24 hours. The ministry announced that the total number of infections is 242,673. The ministry said that the number of recoveries rose by 113, putting the total at 240,159.

Europe cases

More than 1.5 million people have died from COVID-19 in Europe since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, an AFP tally of official data showed yesterday as a number of countries reintroduce measures to try to stem the spread. As of 1000 GMT, the official death toll stood at 1,500,105 in a combined 52 countries since the first fatality was recorded in the region in February, 2020, the data showed.—Agencies



French Embassy marks 'International Day of French Teachers'

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: In celebration of its 60th years of diplomatic relations with Kuwait, the Ambassador of France to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher hosted an international Teacher's Day reception in honor of the local and expatriates French speaking teachers. "Nearly 60 years of friendship - this year, we celebrate the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations and friendship between France and Kuwait," she told the invited guests as she inaugurated the event.

She said the French language has been taught in Kuwait since 1966, when it was introduced into the school system. "I thank the Ministry of National Education and the General Inspectorate for the Teaching of the French Language, which together adhere to the principles stipulated in the "cultural and artistic" cooperation agreement of June 18, 1969, namely: "striving to organize and develop the teaching of the French language in their educational institutions."

The envoy said there are more than 500 French teachers in the

public secondary school and nearly 200 teachers in private schools. French is the third language taught in Kuwait, after Arabic and English, which indicates the existence of strong and lasting relations between our two countries. "Approximately 30,000 learners each year - public and private systems combined; Nearly 10,000 students study French at the baccalaureate every year," she said.

"French is the language of the future in Kuwait - I congratulate the teachers for their hard work, because together they make it possible to preserve the Francophone in Kuwait, which today has been taken to the highest level by such personalities as the current Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah," she said.

Anwar Al-Khandari, General Technical instructor of French Language in Kuwait congratulated French teachers in Kuwait for propagating the language in this part of the world. "On November 25 of each year, we celebrate the International Day of French Teachers. It is an event for French teachers and all those who teach French all over the world. The objective is to promote the profession of French teacher through initiatives, activities and events that will create bonds and solidarity. This friendly reception represents a meeting place for French-speaking teachers in Kuwait, they exchange ideas, encounter rich moments of discussions and share their experiences and practices," he said.

The International Day of French Teacher's Day is an event created in 2019 at the initiative of the President of the French Republic and carried by the International Federation of French Teachers.

Local

Kuwait calls for nuclear, WMD-free Middle East

'ZODIAC Initiative' aims to strengthen global preparedness

NEW YORK: Kuwait has renewed its insistence on establishing a nuclear and weapons of mass destruction (WMD)-free Middle East, which will help preserve international security and peace. This came in a statement delivered by Kuwait's Permanent Representative at the UN Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi during a UN General Assembly debate on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report on Wednesday evening. He stressed that Kuwait is keen to participate annually in the discussion of the IAEA's report just out of its belief in the importance of the pivotal role IAEA plays in promoting the peaceful uses of atomic energy.

"With Kuwait's 57th anniversary of joining

IAEA, my country continues its close cooperation with the Agency's various departments, aiming to benefit from its programs and capabilities required to implement vital projects for social and economic development," Al-Otaibi said. He also expressed Kuwait's readiness to support all initiatives and programs that would contribute to improving living and health conditions, including the "ZODIAC Initiative", which aims to strengthen global preparedness system to face pandemics that may appear in the future.

Kuwait contributed \$300,000 to ZODIAC Initiative, in addition to \$100,000 to a recently launched scholarship program bearing physicist

Marie Curie's name, which aims to empower women and increase the number of women in the nuclear field. This helps achieve the sustainable development goals, and is in line with Kuwait's 2035 vision that attaches much significance to women as being half the society.

The Kuwaiti diplomat also pointed out Kuwait's \$500,000 donation to the IAEA's initiative for renewing laboratories in Seibersdorf in Austria, bringing its total contributions to the ReNual Project for renewing the agency's laboratories up to \$1.5 million over the last years. He noted that Kuwait's delegation follows up with the periodical reports issued by the IAEA Director General on

implementing the UN Security Council Resolution 2231 regarding Iran's nuclear program.

In this context, Al-Otaibi urged Iran to ratify and implement the additional protocol so that IAEA would be able to provide credible assurances concerning the absence of undeclared nuclear materials and activities in Iran. He recalled Kuwait's participation in the conference's first session on establishing a nuclear and WMD-free Middle East, while looking forward to the second session headed by Kuwait in a few days' time, stressing full keenness to achieve its goals and urging the participation of all concerned countries. —KUNA

Kuwaiti photographer wins 2nd place in US Wildlife Contest



NEW YORK: Kuwaiti photographer Fahad Al-Enezi, won second place at the 50th annual National Wildlife Federation Photo Contest held in the United States. In a statement to KUNA, Al-Enezi said the photo was taken in the frozen shores of Hokkaido Island in far northern Japan, as competition for food during winter can breed conflict. He witnessed this one when he visited a spot where white-tailed sea eagles were feeding on fish, when a brazen red fox moved in to grab a bite, the eagle gave the fox what looks like a good slap with its wings, Al-Enezi said.

Number of photos this year reached more than 40,000. It was organized by one of the largest American non-profit organizations, founded on February 3, 1936, and aims to protect the environment and wildlife and raise awareness of the importance of preserving them around the world, he added. Al-Enezi, during his artistic and scientific career in the field of documenting wildlife and birds, won about 230 international and local awards. —KUNA



KFH organizes breast cancer awareness campaign

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House "KFH" concluded its integrated breast cancer awareness campaign, which has continued throughout the month of October under the title "Be Aware". The campaign, organized annually by KFH, depicts KFH's commitment to its leading and distinguished role in social service and continuous participation in health initiatives. Also, the campaign reflects KFH's keenness to support various activities and events to spread health awareness among society members.

Public Relations and Event Management Coordinator at KFH-Maryam Abaalkhail said: "The campaign, which has coincided with the International Breast Cancer Awareness Month of October, aimed to increase awareness level regarding breast cancer and encourage women to conduct early examination."

She added that KFH has utilized all its channels on social media to spread awareness through awareness messages, videos, media messages, advertisements, competitions, events, campaigns, interviews and seminars as part of its comprehensive campaign. Also, it has coordinated and cooperated with specialized and highly experienced doctors to speak about matters relating to the early detection of breast cancer and the means and methods of prevention against this disease.

It is worth mentioning that KFH has a long record in supporting the health sector and considers it as one of the main priorities in its social responsibility strategy. In this respect, KFH has continuously fostered and supported events and initiatives in the health field e.g., diabetes awareness events, organizing first aid courses, blood donation and holding several seminars and campaigns to spread awareness for prevention from various diseases.



Maryam Abaalkhail



Australia deploys
peacekeepers as riots
rock Solomon Islands

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War-hit Ethiopia admonishes US over security warnings

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CALAIS, France: Migrants who were found soaked after a failed attempt to cross the Channel walk out from a shelter and take a bus to a warm place, in the rue des huttes in Calais yesterday. —AFP

Over 27 dead in Channel migrant disaster

France, UK vow action after deadliest migrant tragedy

LONDON/PARIS: Britain and France were yesterday looking at new measures to limit migration across the Channel and break people-smuggling networks after at least 27 migrants trying to reach England drowned off the northern French coast.

The disaster is the deadliest accident since the Channel in 2018 became a hub for migrants from the Africa, the Middle East and Asia who have been increasingly using small boats to reach England from France. President Emmanuel Macron, after vowing France would not allow the Channel to become a “cemetery”, spoke to British Prime Minister Boris Johnson to agree on stepping up efforts to thwart the traffickers blamed for the surge in crossings. Prime Minister Jean Castex also held a crisis meeting yesterday with ministers to discuss new measures, his office said.

Seventeen men, seven women and three minors died when the inflatable boat lost air and took on water off the northern port of Calais on Wednesday, according to public prosecutors in Lille. A manslaughter probe has been opened. The disaster poses a new challenge to cooperation between France and Britain after Brexit. Initial statements from both sides

pinning responsibility on the other party to act indicated the tragedy will not be an automatic catalyst for cooperation.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said a total of five suspected traffickers accused of being directly linked to the doomed crossing had been arrested, the fifth man suspected of buying inflatable boats for the crossing.

Darmanin said only two survivors, an Iraqi and Somali, had been found and they were recovering from extreme hypothermia and would eventually be questioned.

Calais mayor Natacha Bouchart said a pregnant woman was also one of the victims.

‘Persuading our partners’

In telephone talks, Johnson and Macron agreed on the “urgency of stepping up joint efforts to prevent these deadly crossings” and that “it is vital to keep all options on the table” to break the business model of the smuggling gangs, according to Downing Street. But Johnson told British media London had faced “difficulties persuading some of our partners, particularly the French, to do things in a way that the situation deserves”.

And in a terse readout of the talks, the Elysee Palace said Macron told Johnson that France and the UK have a “shared responsibility” and added he “expected the British to cooperate fully and refrain from exploiting a dramatic situation for political ends”.

British officials said Johnson renewed an offer to send police and border forces to France to carry out joint patrols along the Channel coast—an idea that has been rebuffed by Paris in the past. In a sign of the tensions, Britain’s biggest-selling tabloid newspapers all carried a front-page picture of a French police vehicle apparently sitting idly by as migrants entered the waters off northern France.

More than 25,700 people have made the cross-Channel journey in small boats this year—three times the total for the whole of 2020, according to data compiled by Britain’s PA news agency. Darmanin insisted that Paris was doing all it could to break the trafficking networks, saying France had arrested 1,500 people smugglers since the start of the year and accusing them of operating like “mafia organizations”.

He was due to hold new talks with British counterpart Priti Patel later. — AFP

International

Eight killed in deadly bombing near school in Somalia capital

Al-Shabaab jihadists claim the latest attack in the troubled country

MOGADISHU: Eight people were killed in a car bombing near a school in Somalia's capital Mogadishu yesterday, police said, the latest attack claimed by Al-Shabaab jihadists in the troubled country.

Anguished parents rushed to the scene of the blast, which wrecked the school building, as injured students were taken to hospitals around the city. The explosion hit at around 7:30 am, just as children were settling down for their first lessons, principal Yusuf Hussein Abdi said.

In seconds, wooden beams and tin sheets came crashing down on the young pupils, as some of the walls gave way. "You can understand how it feels when many students, mostly children, came under attack as school rooms collapsed," Abdi said.

People pulled injured victims out of the rubble, using their bare hands to carry them to safety until ambulances arrived. Somalia police spokesman Abdifatah Adan said in a brief statement that eight civilians were killed and 17 others wounded, without giving further details.

Security official Mohamed Abdillahi told AFP the explosion was caused by a car bomb, but added: "We don't know the target of the attack." Witnesses said a large convoy carrying troops from AMISOM, the African Union force fighting the Al-Qaeda-linked Al-Shabaab group, was passing through the area when the bomb went off. "I was close to the area when the blast occurred, there was an AMISOM convoy... passing by," Said Ibrahim told AFP.

'Students bleeding'

Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the bombing, saying it

was aimed at "military trainers." The militants frequently carry out attacks in the capital and elsewhere in the country against civilian, military and government targets. "Everyone was shocked and the scene was really horrible," said Naima Ali, whose daughter was among the lucky ones to escape the carnage unharmed.

"I saw some of the students bleeding," Ali said. Mohamud Omar, whose cousin was at the school when the attack occurred, said the blast left a trail of devastation in its wake, with backpacks scattered under the debris. "The blast destroyed the whole area and left the road in ruins, thanks to God that most of the students were unharmed despite the huge damage the explosion caused," he said. The founder of Mogadishu's Amin ambulance service, Abdulkadir Abdirahman Adan, shared photos of the rubble-strewn scene on Twitter, calling the bombing "a tragedy".

'Heinous and reprehensible'

The East African bloc IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development) condemned what it described as a "heinous and reprehensible terrorist attack". IGAD executive secretary Workneh Gebeyehu said in a statement he "shares the grief of all peace-loving Somalis, and conveys his sincerest condolence to the government and people of Somalia and the families of the victims of the attack".

On Saturday, a prominent Somali journalist was killed and a colleague seriously wounded in a suicide bombing claimed by Al-Shabaab. Abdiaziz Mohamud Guled, the director of government-owned Radio Mogadishu, was a fierce critic of the Islamists.

Al-Shabaab, which has been waging a violent insurgency



MOGADISHU: Police officers and people stand at the bomb explosion site in Mogadishu, Somalia, yesterday. —AFP

against the country's fragile government since 2007, said its fighters had long pursued the journalist. The militants also claimed two attacks in September that together killed 17 people.

A car bombing on September 25 near the presidential palace killed eight people, including the prime minister's adviser for women and human rights, Hibaq Abukar. Eleven days earlier, nine people, most of them members of Somalia's security forces, died in a blast near a Mogadishu checkpoint.

Al-Shabaab controlled the capital until 2011 when it was pushed out by AMISOM troops, but it still holds territory in the countryside. —AFP

Bulgaria reduces bus crash toll to 44

SOFIA: Bulgarian prosecutors yesterday revised down to 44 the death toll from a bus crash this week, saying human error most likely caused one of Europe's worst road accidents in a decade. A bus full mostly with tourists from North Macedonia crashed on a highway and caught fire south of Sofia early Tuesday while returning from Istanbul, in Turkey, to Skopje.

The passengers were trapped but seven survived by breaking a back window to escape. They have all been hospitalized in Sofia and are in stable condition. "Autopsies revealed that the victims died mainly as a result of asphyxiation from the fire that broke out... soot was found in their respiratory tracts," deputy prosecutor general Borislav Sarafov told reporters.

"At present, the leading and main version that seems to formulate is one of a human error," he said, adding prosecutors were still probing if "bad road organization, bad signalization, bad markings" might have misled the driver. The prosecution has ruled out that a terrorist act or an explosion caused the fire, he said.

Border police records show that 52 passengers were on board when the bus entered Bulgaria.

Sarafov said 44 bodies were found at the site of the crash so investigators were still trying to account for one more person. Four buses were travelling in the group and witnesses said they stopped at a gas station and some passengers transferred to other vehicles before the accident. "We presume that one passenger must have moved to another bus," Sarafov said.

Prosecutors believe the bus driver crashed into guardrails. A detached rail was then dragged along causing sparks that ignited the bus. The driver veered into the center of the highway, breaking through the guardrails where the bus became stuck, said lead investigator Mariyan Marinov.

The front door of the vehicle was ripped open in the crash, but "a huge fire" prevented passengers from escaping that way. That prompted them to pile up at the back door, only to find it blocked by the guardrail, Marinov added, explaining the high toll.

The crash is Bulgaria's deadliest, and the worst road accident in Europe in a decade, plunging the country and its neighbor North Macedonia into mourning. The dead include a dozen minors with the youngest fatality four-year-old twins, according to media reports. —AFP

Egypt sentences 22 jihadists to death

CAIRO: An Egyptian court yesterday sentenced to death by hanging 22 Islamist militants for 54 attacks including the attempted assassination of a former interior minister, a judicial source told AFP. The men were found guilty of committing 54 "terrorist operations" across Egypt, including the murder of a senior police officer as well as trying to kill former interior minister Mohamed Ibrahim.

Executions in Egypt for civilians are carried out by hanging. Those sentenced to death include a former police officer, and the verdicts cannot be appealed. The 22 convicted were found guilty of being members of the Ansar Beit al-Maqdis group, which pledged its allegiance to the Islamic State group in 2014.

The Court of Cassation, Egypt's highest appeals court, also upheld prison sentences of 118 others in the same case, ranging from terms of several years to life imprisonment. Egypt has for years been fighting a bitter

insurgency in North Sinai that escalated after the army's 2013 ouster of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi. In February 2018, the army and police launched a nationwide operation against militants focused on North Sinai.

Around 1,073 suspected militants and dozens of security personnel have been killed since the start of operations, according to official figures. Earlier this month, Egypt agreed with Israel to boost its troop numbers around the border town of Rafah in order to quell IS militants. Ansar Beit al-Maqdis fighters in Sinai were led by Hisham al-Ashmawy, an ex-special forces officer. Ashmawy - once dubbed Egypt's "most wanted man" - split from the militants after they switched allegiance from Al-Qaeda to the Islamic State group.

In 2018, Ashmawy was captured in the eastern Libya city of Derna, and extradited to Cairo. He had been on trial with the 22 men sentenced yesterday, but had already been found guilty, and was executed in March 2020. Egypt, the most populous Arab country, recorded the third most executions in the world - behind China and Iran according to Amnesty International. In 2020, Egyptian authorities executed at least 107 people, Amnesty said. —AFP

International

Three Lebanese judges resign in protest over 'interference'

BEIRUT: Three Lebanese judges have resigned over interference by politicians in the work of the judiciary, including a probe into last year's Beirut blast, a judicial source said yesterday. In a country where political leaders determine judicial appointments, including in top courts, there is little room for the judiciary to work against Lebanon's ruling elite. A probe into last year's monster port explosion has exposed the extent of such interference, with top officials mounting a complex web of court challenges to obstruct the work of lead investigator Tarek Bitar.

On Wednesday three judges, all women, handed in their resignation "to protest...political interference in the work of the judiciary and the undermining of decisions issued by judges and courts," the judicial source said. The head of the

country's top court has yet to approve the resignations and has called for the matter to be discussed in a meeting, the source added. The resignations came after officials filed dozens of lawsuits against Bitar as well as other judges processing requests by lawmakers demanding his removal.

Among those who resigned this week is a judge who turned down a request by an official to remove the investigator. She was consequently hit with a review questioning the validity of her decision. "The constant questioning of the judiciary's decisions is tarnishing its reputation," the same court official told AFP on condition of anonymity. While it is the most prominent, the Beirut blast case is not the only one to fall prey to interference by political leaders.

A probe into charges of tax evasion and illicit

enrichment brought against central bank chief Riad Salameh has also been paused over a lawsuit filed against lead investigator Jean Tannous. Lebanon orders travel agents to stop advertising Belarus Lebanon's government yesterday ordered travel agents to stop promoting Belarus as a destination in a bid to stem the flow of migrants attempting to enter the European Union. The move came in a circular published by the national news agency and issued by Tourism Minister Walid Nassar, who said it was aimed at preventing Beirut from being used as a departure point.

Thousands of migrants - including from Lebanon, Syria and Iraq - have been massing at Belarus' border with Poland, hoping to seek asylum in the EU. The West accuses Belarus of creating the crisis by bringing in would-be migrants

and taking them to the border with promises of an easy crossing into the bloc. "Some of those nationals from Middle Eastern and African countries who are hoping to emigrate are using Rafic Hariri airport" in Beirut, Nassar said.

Belarus denies it engineered the crisis to use as leverage against Western sanctions but migrants have been caught in between, many left stranded in the cold, forested border area. For holders of the citizenships most represented among the migrants, visas to Belarus have been easier to obtain than for most other countries that have land borders with the EU. Airport authorities in Lebanon had already put a curb on some nationalities booking flights with Belavia, a Belarusian airline whose number of flights from Beirut had conspicuously increased recently.—AFP

Sudanese security forces fire teargas at anti-coup protests

KHARTOUM: Sudanese security forces fired tear gas yesterday at thousands of protesters who rallied against a deal that saw the prime minister reinstated after his ouster in a military coup last month, witnesses said. Demonstrators in the capital, Khartoum, chanted "the people want the downfall of the regime" while in the capital's twin city Omdurman others shouted "power to the people, a civilian government is the people's choice". Security forces fired tear gas to disperse protesters in Omdurman as well as in the central state of North Kordofan and in North Darfur, witnesses said.

General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan seized power and detained Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok on October 25, but after international condemnation and mass protests he reinstated the premier in a deal they signed on Sunday. "I initially went out to protest to demand retribution for people killed after the coup, and now I am protesting against the Burhan-Hamdok deal," protester Soheir Hamad told AFP in south Khartoum.

This deal "blocks the way toward a full civilian rule. We don't want the military to play a role in politics", she said. Protests also broke out in other states including Wad Madani, Kassala, and the western Darfur region, according to witnesses. Pro-democracy activists in Sudan have accused Hamdok of "betrayal" and vowed to maintain pressure on the military-civilian authority.

Protest organisers have dubbed yesterday as "Martyr's day", to pay tribute to the 42 people killed, according to medics, in the deadly crackdown against anti-coup demonstrators.

Hamdok, who has been prime minister in the transitional government since the ouster of long-time autocratic ruler Omar al-Bashir in 2019, as defended the deal. But protesters in North Khartoum slammed him, chanting: "Burhan is dirty" and has been "brought to power by Islamists", connected to Bashir's regime.

Ahead of Thursday's protests, Hamdok met with senior police officials and urged them to secure the protests. Volker Perthes, the UN special envoy to Sudan who helped mediate between the military and civilian factions after the coup, said Wednesday that the rallies were "another test of credibility" of the agreement.—AFP

Thousands protest in Sudan against military takeover

KHARTOUM: Thousands of Sudanese protesters rallied yesterday against last month's military power grab, rejecting an agreement struck between the top general that saw the prime minister reinstated, witnesses said. In Khartoum, demonstrators chanted "the people want the downfall of the regime". In the capital's twin city Omdurman others shouted "power to the people, a civilian government is the people's choice".

General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan seized power and detained Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok on October 25, but after international condemnation and mass protests he reinstated the premier on Sunday. But protest organizers in the northeast African state have accused Hamdok of "treason" and vowed to maintain pressure on the military-civilian authority. Activists took to social media this week to call for "Martyrs' Day" demonstrations yesterday, in honor of the 42 protesters killed in the post-coup crackdown, according to an updated toll from medics.

Hamdok, who has been prime minister in the transitional government since the ouster of long-time autocratic ruler Omar Al-Bashir in 2019, said Wednesday he had partnered with the military in order to "stop the bloodshed" and to "not squander the gains of the last two years". Hamdok himself was placed under house arrest after the putsch, which sparked a wave of mass street protests that triggered a deadly crackdown by security forces. The deal he signed with Burhan lays down a "clear date" for Sudan's first free elections in three decades slated for July 2023, the premier said.

'Test of credibility'

Twelve out of 17 ministers from a bloc calling for a purely civilian government resigned on Monday, rejecting Hamdok's strategy of engaging with the military. Reserving their ire for Burhan, protesters in North Khartoum chanted that "Burhan is dirty", and had been "brought to power by Islamists", connected to the old regime of Bashir. Ihsan Omar, a witness in Omdurman, said he had witnessed some 500 people taking part in a rally.

Volker Perthes, the UN special envoy to Sudan who helped



KHARTOUM: Sudanese protesters gather in the busy Jabra district of southern Khartoum yesterday. Thousands of Sudanese protesters rallied against last month's military power grab, rejecting an agreement struck between the top general that saw the prime minister reinstated, witnesses said. —AFP

mediate between the military and civilian factions after the coup, said Wednesday that the rallies were "another test of credibility" of the agreement. He urged authorities to allow demonstrations to go ahead "without bloodshed or arbitrary arrests". Elsewhere in Sudan, in the western Darfur region, at least 35 people were reported to have been killed in days of fighting between herders with more than a thousand homes set on fire, officials said yesterday.

The violence broke out on November 17 between armed Arab herders in the rugged Jebel Moon mountains close to the border with Chad, said Omar Abdelkarim, Sudan's Humanitarian Aid Commissioner in West Darfur state. Darfur was ravaged by a civil war which erupted in 2003, that pitted ethnic minority rebels complaining of discrimination against the Arab-dominated government of Bashir.

More than 300,000 people died and 2.5 million were displaced, according to the UN. Bashir, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court to face charges of genocide in Darfur, was jailed in 2019 following mass protests against his three-decade rule. While the main conflict in Darfur has subsided, with a peace deal struck with key rebel groups last year, the arid region has remained awash with weapons and violence often erupts over land, access to agriculture or water.—AFP

International

War-hit Ethiopia admonishes US over security warnings

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopia yesterday accused the United States of spreading false information about security conditions in the war-hit country and warned such statements could harm ties. Washington once viewed Ethiopia as a vital security partner in the volatile Horn of Africa, but relations have soured over Ethiopia's year-long war against rebels who are now threatening to march on the capital Addis Ababa.

On November 5, the State Department ordered the withdrawal of non-essential embassy staff because of "armed conflict, civil unrest, and possible supply shortages", and several other diplomatic missions have followed suit.

This week the US embassy further rankled Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government by posting a warning about the potential for terrorist attacks in Ethiopia. "Previously they disseminated the information that Addis Ababa is surrounded [by rebels], now they are saying this false information that a terror attack will be conducted," Kebede Desisa, a government spokesman, told a press conference for state media yesterday.

"These actions hurt the two countries' historical relations," he said. The war erupted in November 2020 when Abiy, winner of the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize, sent troops into the Tigray region to topple its ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

Self-defense militias rise in Niger: Jihadist attacks mount

TILLABERI: Abdoulaye casts a questioning eye over the passengers of a car that has pulled up at the entrance to his village in western Niger. Slung over the shoulder of his long and slender frame are a bow and a quiver of arrows - the only weapon he has against the ruthless, highly-armed men who prowl the region. "I'm a member of the Vigilance Committee," he said. "I'm just carrying out a patrol of the village." The "Committee" is just one of the many self-defense groups that have sprouted in the violence-torn Tillaberi region. Remote and arid, Tillaberi is reeling from a string of massacres by suspected jihadists, many of them operating from across the border in troubled Mali.

Cattle theft, ransom kidnappings, targeted killings and extortion add to the community's list of woes. Exasperated and fearful, villagers have rushed to set up local militias - but sometimes at deadly cost to their young men. "Young villagers... have signed up to avenge the dead and protect their property," said a former mayor of Banibangou, a town near Abdoulaye's village. "They are merely equipped with (bows and) arrows, knives and probably a few guns," a Banibangou resident said.

A new self-defense group emerged earlier this year in neighboring Tahoua after 141 people were slaughtered in March. A video circulating on social media shows men clutching automatic weapons, saying they have "taken up arms against terrorism." But the price for openly defying the jihadists can be lethal. At least 69 militiamen, led by the mayor of Banibangou, were killed in an ambush on November 2. On November 16, 25 members of another self-defense group were killed at a camp in Bakorat in Tahoua.

Tolerated

The poorest country in the world by the benchmark of the UN's human development index, Niger is struggling with jihadist attacks both in the west on the border with Mali, and in the

He said the move was in response to TPLF attacks on federal army camps and promised a swift victory, but by late June the rebels had retaken most of Tigray, including its capital Mekele. Since then, the TPLF has pushed into neighbouring Amhara and Afar regions, and this week it claimed to have seized a town just 220 kilometres (135 miles) from Addis Ababa.

The African Union's special envoy for the Horn of Africa, Olusegun Obasanjo, is leading a diplomatic push for a ceasefire, but there have been few signs of progress so far. On Wednesday state media reported that Abiy, a former lieutenant-colonel in the military, had arrived at the front line to lead a counter-offensive, handing over regular duties to his deputy.

Also on Wednesday, Ireland announced Ethiopia had demanded the departure of four of its Addis Ababa-based diplomats because of Ireland's criticism of the war. Ethiopia has also expelled seven senior UN officials over alleged "meddling" in the country's affairs.

The Biden administration this month announced its intention to boot Ethiopia from a key trade pact that grants duty-free access for most exports. But it has held off on imposing sanctions against the Ethiopian government and rebels in hopes of encouraging a settlement. —AFP

southeast, on the border with Nigeria. Its armed forces, operating across a vast and often empty landscape, are massively under-equipped.

As a result, President Mohamed Bazoum's government has adopted the posture of tolerating the militias, while not formally banning them. "The government doesn't encourage people to defend themselves - it's very dangerous for them," said General Mahamadou Abou Tarka, head of the High Authority for the Consolidation of Peace (HACP), a government institution tasked with building dialogue between communities. Souley Oumarou, who heads a campaign group called Forum for a Responsible Citizenship, said militias heighten the risk of inflaming ethnic tensions.

"Self-defence groups may attack members" of another ethnic group that have jihadists in their ranks, and this unleashes tit-for-tat violence, Oumarou said. Bazoum went to Banibangou after the latest bloodshed, where he told locals that he understood why they were "not satisfied" with the army's performance. "If you think that you can provide your own defense, that's legitimate, but the thing which should ensure your defense and on which you can count is the state," he cautioned.

Burkina lesson

In neighboring Burkina Faso, the government has set up an official self-defense force - the Volunteers for the Defense of the Motherland (VDP) - to act in a supporting role for the army. Volunteers receive 14 days of training and are then sent out on patrols and surveillance missions, equipped with light arms. More than 250 VDP members been killed since the force was set up in December 2019, and some observers argue that the existence of the militia itself is an incentive for violence. "It hasn't stopped the cycle of terror," a Nigerien security source said.

Seeking to drain support for creating militias and to strengthen the army, Niger's government has set up a program to train young people to join the National Guard in jihadist-hit regions. Around 500 have already been recruited in the southeastern region of Diffa, and 500 are expected to follow suit in Tillaberi and Tahoua, a presidential aide said. Last month, Bazoum announced three-year spending plans of more than 150 billion CFA francs (\$260 million) to help "strengthen the capacity" of the air force. The country is also going to buy drones, planes and armored vehicles from Turkey.—AFP



ADDIS ABABA: New military recruits who are joining the Ethiopian National Defence Force hold papers showing messages of "NO More" as they protest against purported fake news during the send-off ceremony in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. —AFP

Mali tour guides transformed into battlefield interpreters

OUAGADOUGOU: Aboubacar shared tea and sugary snacks with his colleagues gathered on a mat at a UN camp in battle-scarred Mali. He speaks plainly but with a hint of irony about his transformation from a tour guide of 14 years experience up until 2014 into a frontline military interpreter. After the war upended his business, he sought out work as a translator for the British contingent of the UN's mission in Mali MINUSMA.

"Before we were protecting the white tourists, but now it's the whites who protect us in the bush," he said with a smile. There are dozens of others like him who work with the British blue helmets every day, speaking Tamasheq, Songhai or Arabic. He pulled a scarf over his nose, donned dark glasses and became almost unrecognisable. "It's very different from what we did before, but the goal is the same: to show the country to foreigners," said Aboubacar, an alias to protect him and his colleagues.

There were numerous tour guides in the region during the golden age of tourism in the 1990s and 2000s. They took visitors to see the famed mosque at Djenné, the manuscripts of Timbuktu and to bathe in the Banfora waterfalls in Burkina Faso, among other places. But they lost their livelihoods in the 2010s when separatist movements and jihadist groups unleashed a cycle of deadly violence that made the region, rich in heritage and natural beauty, too dangerous for tourists. Most did not find other work.

After several years of unemployment, Aboubacar followed a friend's advice and used his strong English learnt guiding tourists to approach the UN. He flew to their base at Gao which is home to the peacekeepers as well as French forces. Now he is an intermediary with the local population, dressed in a large army jacket and weaving in and out of the bush in armoured vehicles. —AFP

International

COVID deaths top 1.5m across Europe

EU approves first COVID jab for kids aged 5-11

BRUSSELS: Europe yesterday reached the grim milestone of 1.5 million coronavirus deaths as nations scramble to tackle a worsening crisis with winter approaching. In response, France accelerated its COVID booster rollout and Germany, with fatalities and infections surging, weighed new measures.

With the world braced for the full onslaught of yet another wave, the EU's medicines agency cleared a vaccine for children as young as five. But South Africa reported a new worrying COVID-19 variant with devastating potential, the EU medicines agency cleared a vaccine for children as young as five.

In Paris, Health Minister Olivier Veran said COVID-19 booster shots, until now only available to people over 65 or with health problems, would be accessible to all adults starting this weekend. From January 15, people over 18 would need to show proof of a top-up vaccine dose to maintain a valid COVID pass, which is required to enter restaurants, bars, gyms and other public venues.

The minister said the stringent measure could see France through the fifth wave without recourse to another lockdown, which the government is desperately trying to avoid. Adding pressure, the EU Commission recommended that the bloc's vaccination certificate should become invalid once the holder's latest dose is more than nine months old.

'Grim milestone'

The number of daily new cases in France hit a seven-month high of 32,591 on Wednesday but the burden of critical cases in hospital remains manageable—a fact experts put down to France's energetic vaccination drive. Neighboring Germany meanwhile reported record coronavirus fatalities and infections yesterday as its total death toll passed 100,000 — a “grim milestone”, said Bild daily—just as a new government prepared to replace Angela Merkel's coalition.

Europe's largest economy recorded 351 COVID fatalities in the past 24 hours, bringing the official death toll since the start of the pandemic to 100,119. The weekly incidence rate also hit an all-time high of 419.7 new infections per 100,000 people, according to the Robert Koch Institute health agency.

230 migrants crossed Belarus border by force

WARSAW: Some 230 migrants forced their way through the border from Belarus with the help of Belarusian border guards but were immediately sent back across, Poland said yesterday. “They destroyed the fence and a group of 232 people made their way several metres into Polish territory,” border guard spokeswoman Anna Michalska told Polish news agency PAP. “The officers instructed them to leave Polish territory and escorted them to the border demarcation,” she said, adding the incident happened late Wednesday.

The EU and US accuse Belarus of manufac-

turing the crisis by bringing in migrants from the Middle East and then taking them to the border — an accusation that Belarus denies. In a statement, Polish border guards said the migrants “threw rocks and sticks at Polish forces” as Belarusian forces used lasers and strobe lighting to try and blind Polish officers. The border guard spokeswoman said five migrants were taken to hospital suffering from “exhaustion”.

The border guards said there were a total of 375 attempted crossings from Belarus on Wednesday. Aid groups say at least 11 migrants have died on both sides of the border since the crisis began in the summer and have criticized the Polish government over its policy of pushing migrants back. So far this year Poland has clocked more than 35,000 attempted illegal crossings from Belarus. They include 6,000 in November, nearly 17,300 in October, some 7,700 in September and over 3,500 in August, according to border guard data. —AFP



LES ABYMES, France: Demonstrators hold placards during a protest march against measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 in Les Abymes, outside Pointe-a-Pitre, on the French Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, on Wednesday. —AFP

Back in Europe, the Pfizer/BioNTech jab got the green light for five to 11 year-olds, clearing the way for the vaccination in an age group where the virus is rapidly spreading, and bringing the EU into line with the US, Israel and Canada. The European Medicines Agency, using the jab's brand name, said “the benefits of Comirnaty in children aged five to 11 outweigh the risks”.

The EU cleared Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine for use in children aged five to 11 yesterday, the first jab to be approved in a cohort where the virus is rapidly spreading. Only a small handful of countries had previously given the nod for coronavirus vaccinations in younger children, including the United States, Israel and Canada.

“I'm glad to tell you that Comirnaty from today has received approval for children five to 11 years of age,” said Marco Cavaleri, head of vaccine strategy at the European Medicines Agency (EMA), using the vaccine's brand name. “This is based on a different dose in the one used in adults, essentially it's a much lower dose,” he told an online public meeting.

The vaccine was already cleared for use in people aged 12 and over in the 27-nation EU.

Putin fires jail chief after torture videos

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin fired the head of the country's prison service yesterday, the Kremlin said in a statement, after harrowing videos of torture and rape inside a jail were leaked. Putin dismissed Alexander Kalashnikov, who has been targeted by Western sanctions over the jailing of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, with immediate effect. He served as prison chief for only two years. The Russian leader appointed Arkady Gostev, a police colonel from the interior ministry, in his place. The move comes after rights groups published dozens of videos of torture from inside a prison

in the central city of Saratov last month.

They were smuggled out of the facility by a former inmate, Sergei Savelyev, who has since fled Russia and asked for asylum in France. Earlier this month, Russia's prison service said it had dismissed 18 officials in the Saratov region in connection with the videos and opened several probes. The Kremlin had previously called for the case to be investigated. Moscow had placed Savelyev — a citizen of Belarus — on a wanted list last month, but then removed him from it.

During his prison term, Savelyev worked as an IT maintenance officer, earning access to the prison's internal server and those of other jails, where he found surveillance footage showing abuse. He saved them on a USB stick that he hid near the prison exit. NGO Gulagu.net then published the videos of the abuse. Russia's vast prison system has long been a place of torture and sexual violence inflicted on inmates, monitors say, but the videos cast new light on abuses. —AFP



BRUSSELS: European Union commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson speaks during a press conference on travelling from outside the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic at the EU headquarters in Brussels yesterday. —AFP

Children aged five to 11 will be given one third of the dose that older people receive, with two injections, three weeks apart, the EMA said in a statement. The vaccine was 90.7 percent effective in a study of nearly 2,000 children of that age, it added. Side effects were usually “mild or moderate” lasting a few days, and included pain in the injection site, tiredness, headache, muscle pain and chills.

The EMA “therefore concluded that the benefits of Comirnaty in children aged five to 11 outweigh the risks, particularly in those with conditions that increase the risk of severe COVID-19.” But the Pfizer jab's safety in children “will continue to be monitored closely”.

'Rare in children'

Health authorities say children make up an increasing proportion of new cases and hospitalizations in Europe, which is back at the center of the coronavirus pandemic. Children are also considered key drivers of infections even when they themselves do not come down with symptoms. In the Netherlands, where the EMA is based, authorities said earlier this week that the largest increase in cases was among children up to the age of 12. —AFP

International

Germany's COVID death toll passes 100,000 as infections surge

BERLIN: Germany announced record coronavirus fatalities and infections yesterday as its total death toll passed 100,000, with its most severe virus wave yet swelling just as a new government prepares to replace Angela Merkel's coalition.

Germany weathered earlier bouts of the pandemic better than many other European countries, but has seen a recent resurgence, with intensive care beds rapidly filling up. Europe's largest economy recorded 351 COVID fatalities in the past 24 hours, bringing the official death toll since the start of the pandemic to 100,119, in what Bild daily called a "grim milestone".

The weekly incidence rate also hit an all-time high of 419.7 new infections per 100,000 people, according to figures from the Robert Koch Institute health agency. The escalating health crisis poses an immediate challenge to the new centre-left-led coalition government set to take over from Merkel's cabinet next month. The country has been stuck in political limbo since the September 26 general election, with the popular former scientist Merkel governing only in a caretaker capacity.

'Thousands dying daily'

Merkel's presumed successor Olaf Scholz began a presentation of his new government's policy roadmap Wednesday by announcing new measures to tame the fourth wave. These included forming a corona response task force based at his office and earmarking one billion euros (\$1.12 billion) in bonuses for overstretched health workers on the front lines of the pandemic.

However, those steps and nationwide restrictions announced last week to limit the unvaccinated from participating in public life have been criticised as far too little and too late. "The latest decisions are like announcing in a flooding catastrophe a plan to hire more swimming teachers and distributing a few water wings

Russian Supreme Court considers closure of rights group Memorial

MOSCOW: Russia's Supreme Court yesterday began hearing a request to shut down Memorial, the country's most prominent rights group and a pillar of its civil society. Founded by Soviet dissidents including Nobel Peace Prize laureate Andrei Sakharov in 1989, Memorial has built up a huge archive of Soviet-era crimes and campaigned tirelessly for human rights in Russia.

Prosecutors have asked the court to dissolve Memorial International, the group's central structure, for allegedly violating Russia's controversial law on "foreign agents". The move has sparked widespread outrage, with supporters saying the shuttering of Memorial would mark the end of an era in Russia's post-Soviet democratisation.

It comes in a year that has seen an unprecedented crackdown on opponents of President Vladimir Putin, including the jailing of chief Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny and the banning of his organisations. Dozens gathered outside the court to support Memorial on a cold Moscow day as the hearing began.

Maria Krechetova, a 48-year-old philosophy teacher, said shutting Memorial would be an "insult to the millions" of those who suffered under the repressive Soviet regime. "Banning Memorial would deal a final blow to the idea that a person means something (in Russia), and that their rights mean something," she said. "It is unprecedented," she said, adding that "almost everyone" in Russia counts victims of Soviet-era crimes within their family.

and rubber ducks," Sueddeutsche newspaper fumed.

"The coalition has big plans, but what use are they if we are all locked down over Christmas with thousands dying each day? The new government would be well advised to throw everything it has for now at tackling the pandemic."

The spike in Germany comes as Europe has re-emerged as the pandemic's epicentre, with the continent battling sluggish vaccine uptake in some nations, the highly contagious Delta variant, colder weather sending people indoors and the easing of restrictions. Last week, more than 2.5 million cases and almost 30,000 COVID-related deaths were recorded in Europe, making it by far the region currently worst hit by the virus, according to AFP's tally.

'Acute overload'

Meanwhile, the German health sector has had to call on hospitals elsewhere in the EU for help. Some clinics are already facing an "acute overload" that has made it necessary to transfer COVID-19 patients abroad, according to Gernot Marx, head of the German Interdisciplinary Association for Intensive Care and Emergency Medicine.

Germany last week began requiring people to prove they are vaccinated, have recovered from COVID-19 or have recently tested negative for the virus before they can travel on public transport or enter workplaces. Several of the worst-hit areas have gone further, cancelling large events like Christmas markets and barring the unvaccinated from bars, gyms and leisure facilities.

The surge has ignited a fierce debate about whether to follow Austria's example and make vaccination mandatory for all citizens. Scholz has voiced support for compulsory vaccinations for health staff, and said that his government would "do everything necessary to bring our country safely through this time".

Thousands sign petition

By taking the once-unimaginable move to close Memorial, the group's founders say Russian authorities would be sending a signal to both the West and domestic opponents. The message, Memorial founding member Irina Shcherbakova told AFP ahead of the hearing, is: "We are doing to civil society here whatever we want. We will put behind bars whoever we want, we will close down whoever we want."

Vladimir Nemanov, a 25-year-old lawyer, said he was standing outside the court because it was "the only way" to defend Memorial. Remembering the crimes of the past is important "in order to understand and reflect on what is happening in Russia today," Nemanov said, sporting a black facemask with the words "Memorial cannot be banned". More than 100,000 people have signed an online petition asking for the case to be dropped. Yesterday's hearing is in one of two cases brought this month against the group and is being heard by the Supreme Court because Memorial International is registered as an international body. The ruling will not be open to appeal in a Russian court. The other case, against the Memorial Human Rights Centre, began in a Moscow court on Tuesday and will continue later this month.

'Foreign agent' label

Both Memorial International and the Human Rights Centre are accused of violating rules under their designations as "foreign agents"—a legal label that forces individuals or organisations to disclose sources of funding and tag all their publications with a disclaimer. The Human Rights Centre is facing another charge of defending "extremist and terrorist activities" for publishing lists of imprisoned members of banned political or religious movements. The "foreign agent" label—laden with Soviet-era connotations of treachery and espionage—has been used against a wide range of rights groups and independent media in recent years. —AFP



MAGDEBURG: File photo shows a COVID patient gets treatment in the COVID-19 intensive care unit of the community hospital (Klinikum Magdeburg) in Magdeburg, eastern Germany, amid the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. —AFP

Earlier this week, Merkel, who is retiring from politics after four terms, summoned the new alliance's top brass for emergency talks. Germany's COVID-19 crisis has in part been blamed on its relatively low vaccination rate of about 69 percent, compared to other Western European countries such as France, where it is 75 percent.

The country has urged all inoculated adults to get a booster to combat waning efficacy after six months, but that campaign has also been marred by supply and logistics snags. —AFP

Danish forces kill four pirates off Nigeria: Navy

GULF OF GUINEA: A Danish naval patrol killed four pirates in an exchange of fire in the Gulf of Guinea off the coast of Nigeria, Denmark's armed forces said yesterday. "No Danish soldiers were injured, but five pirates were shot," the military said.

"Four of the pirates died. One was injured," it added. The incident occurred on Wednesday when the frigate Esbern Snare, which has been patrolling the area since early November, attempted to board the pirate boat. The Danish forces fired warning shots, and the pirates immediately fired back.

"The Danish soldiers acted in self-defence and returned fire," the statement said. After the shooting, the pirate ship sank and the eight pirates were brought aboard the frigate. A piracy hotspot stretching 5,700 kilometres (3,540 miles) from Senegal to Angola, the Gulf of Guinea saw 195 attacks in 2020.

The same year, 130 of 135 hostage takings at sea occurred in the region, according to the International Maritime Office. The Danish helicopter-equipped frigate and its 175 sailors "are fulfilling an important task by protecting Danish and other commercial vessels in the region," Defence Minister Trine Bramsen told news agency Ritzau. —AFP

International

For Honduran youth, US is the only escape from poverty

Hondurans go to the polls Sunday to elect a successor to Hernandez

TEGUCIGALPA: Wilmer Rodriguez's mother, Lesly Madariaga, spent a sleepless night looking for him in the streets of Nueva Suyapa, a poor neighborhood in the hills surrounding the Honduran capital Tegucigalpa. But to no avail: like thousands of other young Hondurans trying to reach the United States in search of work, Rodriguez and a friend had stolen away in secret.

It was February 2020 but a month later he was back home. Rodriguez, then 17, only got to Mexico before he was picked up by authorities and returned to Honduras. "I want to go again, I still have the desire and it won't leave my head until I pull it off," Rodriguez told AFP.

"If they catch me one, two, three, four, five times again I'll still keep trying because my dream is to support my family." In a country suffering from deep economic woes and rampant violence, and where more than half the population of 10 million lives in poverty, thousands expose themselves to the many risks of migration, not least from human traffickers and extortionists.

It can be a costly and fruitless exercise. According to a recent report, Central American migrants spend around \$2.2 billion a year trying to reach the US, most of which is paid to traffickers. Around 50,000 Honduran migrants have been sent back home this year alone, according to official figures.

'They're all liars'

Hondurans will head to the polls Sunday to elect a successor to President Juan Orlando Hernandez. After 12 years of right-wing Nationalist Party hegemony, some see in leftist former first lady Xiomara Castro an opportunity for change.

But not Rodriguez. No matter who wins, his dream will remain

resolute. "I don't have much faith in politicians because the truth is, they're all liars," he said. Now 18, he puts his faith instead in his ability to become "one of the great" barbers of the world—in the United States.

Upon his return to Honduras, Rodriguez trained to cut hair and is now employed in his neighborhood's La Bendicion salon. He has already won a pair of awards for his work.

In La Bendicion, the barber capes feature the US Stars and Stripes—if ever Rodriguez needed more encouragement. He has not told his mother as much, but she suspects he again will seek to reach the US. "I wouldn't want to go through that process again," she said. "I wouldn't want him to run that risk."

She believes "God always provides food," but knows that is not enough for today's dreamers.

"The youngsters leave for a better life because there is no work here in Honduras."

'My goal is to work'

There are two types of homes on the steep unpaved streets of Nueva Suyapa: sturdy ones built of concrete blocks, whose owners have family abroad, and flimsy ones made of wooden or metal planks. Rodriguez's house measures no more than 20 square meters (215 square feet) but a dozen family members are crammed into its two rooms. In the bedroom, blankets provide makeshift dividing walls. Rodriguez sleeps atop a bunk bed, his mother and sister below.

He earns money now, but not enough. "It's something, but just for me—not to support 12 people," he said. Still, he is determined not to fall into the trap that has seduced many others: gangs.



TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras: Rodriguez Madariaga (right), 18, and his mother Lesly Madariaga are seen during an interview with AFP at their house of the Nueva Suyapa neighborhood in Tegucigalpa. —AFP

Like many Honduran neighborhoods, Nueva Suyapa is beset by the curse of the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18 gangs whose drug-trafficking and extortion-related violence force many young people to flee the country. Local non-governmental groups run programs trying to keep youths out of harm's way, and at home. But the lure from abroad is powerful. —AFP

Three white men found guilty of murdering Black jogger in US

WASHINGTON: Three white men were found guilty of murder Wednesday for shooting dead an African American man after chasing him in their pickup trucks, following a racially-charged trial in the southern US state of Georgia that gripped the nation. Travis McMichael, who shot Ahmaud Arbery, his father Gregory McMichael, and their neighbor, William "Roddie" Bryan, who took part in the chase, were all convicted of multiple counts of murder, aggravated assault and false imprisonment.

A predominantly-white jury in Brunswick, Georgia, deliberated for less than 12 hours over two days before delivering their verdicts. Travis McMichael, 35, Gregory McMichael, 65, a retired police officer, and Bryan, 52, face potential life in prison for the February 2020 shooting of the 25-year-old Arbery.

A crowd erupted in cheers outside the courthouse as the verdict was announced, chanting: "Say his name. Ahmaud Arbery!" "Today is a good day," Arbery's father, Marcus, told the gathering. "I don't want to see no daddy watch their kid get lynched and shot down like that."

President Joe Biden hailed the verdict but said "hard work" remains in combating racism in America.

"Ahmaud Arbery's killing—witnessed by the world on video—is a devastating reminder of how far we have to go in the fight for racial justice in this country," Biden said. The Reverend Al Sharpton, who attended the trial along with Jesse Jackson, an-



BRUNSWICK, US: Wanda Cooper-Jones, mother of Ahmaud Arbery, arrives at the Glynn County Courthouse with Rev Al Sharpton as the jury deliberates in the trial of the killers of Ahmaud Arbery on Wednesday in Brunswick, Georgia. — AFP

other prominent civil rights leader, also welcomed the verdict. "Let the word go forth all over the world that a jury of 11 white, one Black, in the Deep South, stood up in the courtroom and said, 'Black lives do matter,'" Sharpton said.

There was only one Black juror on the panel that heard the case, although about 25 percent of the 85,000 residents of Glynn County are Black.

"The spirit of Ahmaud defeated a lynch mob," said Ben Crump, an attorney for Arbery's father. Arbery's mother, Wanda Cooper-Jones, said she "never thought this day would come." —AFP

Mexican girl fleeing forced marriage detained by police

MEXICO CITY: A 14-year-old indigenous girl was detained by Mexican police after fleeing her community to avoid a forced marriage, human rights defenders said Wednesday. The girl, identified as Anayeli "N", escaped her poverty-stricken community in Joya Real to avoid being sold and married to a 16-year-old boy in exchange for around \$10,000 that would have been paid to her family. She was detained in the southern Mexican state of Guerrero for 14 hours after being captured on Monday night, said Abel Barrera Hernandez, director of the Tlachinollan Human Rights Center.

"Anayeli was detained by the community police for resisting forced marriage at the request of the family of the boy" who she was to marry, the center said in a statement. Marriage between minors was legally banned in Mexico in 2019, but indigenous communities continue to enforce such unions under a tradition that critics have said traps women in abuse and leaves the groom's family mired in poverty, with calls growing for its abolition.

Indigenous people represent around 10 percent of Mexico's population of 126 million, and almost 70 percent live in poverty without access to basic services, according to official figures, leading to the commodification of ancestral dowry rituals to raise money. Guerrero is one of the Mexican states where the sale of minors takes place in exchange for money, animals and even alcoholic beverages. —AFP

International

Friday, November 26, 2021

Afghan Hazara elders pledge support for Taleban rulers

'Dark period of previous Western-backed governments had ended'

KABUL: More than 1,000 Afghan Shiite Hazaras pledged their support yesterday to the country's new Taleban rulers, insisting that the "dark period" of previous Western-backed governments had ended with the return of the Islamists.

Afghanistan's Hazaras have been persecuted by Sunni Islamists for centuries, but yesterday community elders gathered in Kabul alongside Taleban leaders in a show of support. Senior Hazara leader and former lawmaker Jafar Mahdawi, who organized the gathering, said the previous government of president Ashraf Ghani was the "darkest point" in the history of Afghanistan.

"Afghanistan had no independence and (foreign) embassies ruled every aspect of the government," he said. "Thank God, we have now passed this dark period."

Since the Taleban seized power in August, the new rulers have put an end to the war, ended corruption and increased security, Mahdawi said. He however called for a more inclusive government from the Taleban and urged the new rulers to reopen schools for girls.

"In the coming weeks or months we hope to witness an inclusive government that has representatives of all people," Mahdawi

said. The current government, which the Taleban says is interim, is made up almost entirely of the group's Pashtun stalwarts and does not include any women.

Taleban leader and spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told the gathering that rebuilding the country was a priority. "Our jihad against the foreign invaders has ended and now we will start jihad for building the country," he said. The Hazaras, who make up roughly 10 to 20 percent of Afghanistan's around 38 million population, have been persecuted for centuries in the Sunni majority country. In the last two decades they have been targeted in particular by the Taleban and jihadist Islamic State militants, who consider them heretics.

The Islamists have carried out several mass killings of Hazaras, including in the city of Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998, where Human Rights Watch says at least 2,000 mainly Hazara civilians were executed.

Several bomb attacks in recent years have also killed and wounded scores of Hazaras in Kabul and other cities. Just days after the Taleban seized power in August, a statue of a prominent Hazara political leader was decapitated in Bamiyan, a city inhabited mostly by the Shiite community.



More than 1,000 Afghan Shiite Hazaras pledged their support yesterday to the country's new Taleban rulers, insisting that the "dark period" of previous Western-backed governments had ended with the return of the Islamists.

Nobody claimed responsibility for the act, but the Taleban earned notoriety in 2001 for destroying two giant Buddha statues in Bamiyan after deeming them un-Islamic. —AFP

Transgender doctor and Instagram star fights bigotry

MUMBAI: Transgender activist, surgeon in training and Instagram influencer: at just 24, Indian doctor Trinetra Haldar Gummaraju has worn many hats. But one thing has remained constant.

"I was always the woman I am," she told AFP. But few saw her as she wanted to be seen. Instead, from the age of four, Gummaraju was bullied and shamed every time she tried on her mother's sarees or high heels or did anything deemed feminine.

"My parents saw me as a deficient male," said Gummaraju, who is interning at KMC Manipal, one of the country's top teaching hospitals. Older boys molested her, schoolteachers humiliated her and a psychiatrist advised her family to expose her to "more masculine influences".

No one considered the possibility that she was transgender. Especially not Gummaraju. "I didn't even let myself question my gender identity because transgender people have such a negative image in this country—they are seen as scary, abusive, dangerous." Despite the fact that the vast majority of Indians worship Hindu gods who routinely shape-shift from male to female, the transgender community is largely exiled to the margins of society, with many forced to take up begging or sex work.

'Be myself online'

By the time Gummaraju was a teenager, her self-hatred-reinforced by social mores-had deepened to such a degree that she had begun to self-harm. Hope arrived in the form of admission to medical school, an accomplishment that evoked a grudging respect even from those who had shunned her.

There, she found a more supportive community including a therapist who gently urged her to experiment with gender expression. Then there was Instagram—"an online space where I could be myself". Today, she has over 220,000 followers, but her early posts



MUMBAI: In this picture, doctor Trinetra Haldar Gummaraju poses for a picture before an interview with AFP in Mumbai. —AFP

sparked a backlash from conservative professors and some fellow students. She persisted, eventually coming out as transgender, first to her now-supportive family, and then on Facebook to hundreds of people. The transition began with a new name, Trinetra—after a fierce Hindu goddess—followed by hormone replacement therapy in 2018 and surgery in February 2019. It was a euphoric time, she recalled, even as she was advised bed rest for a month to recover. "To see your body change shape—it's like a fog is being lifted", she said. "I could recognize myself in the mirror."

'Stop fear-mongering'

Some of the side effects were unforeseen—and troubling. "It is so unfortunate that one of the things that made me realize I was now a woman... was catcalling and being groped", she said.

She also encountered rape threats when she posted glamorous selfies, something which cisgender women—those whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth—could relate to. "I have experienced a lot of common ground with cisgender women," she said. But the increasingly fractious debate over transgender rights threatens to make her community's existence even more precarious, she said, with some cisgender feminists in the West calling for women-only spaces to be restricted to those who are biologically female.—AFP

India's top court commutes death sentences in rape case

MUMBAI: Mumbai's top court yesterday commuted the death sentences of three men convicted in a rape case that heightened public outrage over women's safety in India. The assault in 2013 followed another high-profile gang-rape case the previous year that left a woman dead in New Delhi, sparking nationwide protests resulting in tougher anti-rape laws.

The three men in Mumbai, along with two accomplices, trapped and repeatedly raped a 22-year-old photojournalist while she was on assignment at an abandoned factory compound. The Shakti Mills complex stands next to a fashionable area of apartments, office blocks, shops and restaurants in India's financial center. The attack dismayed residents of Mumbai, a metropolis considered far safer for women than the capital New Delhi, sparking protests in the city and uproar in the national parliament.

Mumbai police arrested all five within a week of the incident. It prompted a 19-year-old telephone operator to come forward and accuse the trio of also raping her in the same place a month earlier, along with two different accomplices. All seven accused—two of them juveniles—were convicted over the two rapes.

The 2012 New Delhi case prompted a change in the law to make repeat rapists eligible for the death penalty. The three men found guilty in both Mumbai assaults were condemned to hang, the first such sentences under the amended legislation.

At the time of the sentencing they were aged 19, 21 and 28. Mumbai's High Court upheld their convictions yesterday but reduced the sentences to "rigorous life imprisonment" without parole. —AFP

International

Australia deploys peacekeepers as riots rock Solomon Islands

PM Sogavare rejects calls to step down

HONIARA, Solomon Islands: Australia rushed peacekeepers to the Solomon Islands yesterday hoping to quell riots that threatened to topple the Pacific nation's government and left its capital ablaze. After a second day of violent protests that saw widespread rioting, looting and several buildings set alight, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison authorized the snap deployment of a 100-strong police and military force.

Meanwhile, Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare rejected calls to step down yesterday, despite admitting widespread rioting and protests against his rule had brought the Pacific nation "to its knees". "If I am removed as Prime Minister, it will be on the floor of Parliament," a defiant Sogavare said in a late-night address, calling on protesters who have rampaged through the capital Honiara for two days to return to their homes.

Thousands of protesters in the capital Honiara have defied a government lockdown order and taken to the streets to demand the removal of Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare. The tensions have been sparked by pandemic-fuelled economic frustrations and a long-running rivalry between residents of the country's most populous island Malaita and the Guadalcanal-based central government.

Yesterday several buildings around Honiara's Chinatown district were set alight, including commercial properties and a bank branch.

The Chinese government expressed "grave con-

cern" that Chinese-owned businesses appeared to be the target of several of the attacks. Foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian called on the Solomon Islands government "to take all necessary measures to protect the safety of Chinese citizens and organizations". Chinese-owned businesses are a frequent target for violence across Melanesia.

The unrest began on Wednesday when demonstrators attempted to storm parliament to depose Sogavare and ransacked local police stations, making clear the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force was overwhelmed. "There's mobs moving around, it's very tense," one resident told AFP, asking not to be named.

Sogavare had initially insisted his government was in total control, that the "country is safe" and that rioters would "face the full brunt of the law".

But within hours blazes raged across Honiara, plumes of thick black smoke billowed high above the city and Sogavare had asked Australia to send in troops. Morrison said the Australian deployment was immediate and expected to last "a matter of weeks", unlike Canberra's last peacekeeping mission to the Solomons, which ran from 2003 to 2017 and cost about US\$2.2 billion.

"It is not the Australian government's intention in any way to intervene in the internal affairs of the Solomon Islands, that is for them to resolve," he said. "Our purpose here is to provide stability and security."

and burned in the capital Honiara. Local resentment had been building against the dominance of foreign business figures — mostly ethnic Chinese from Taiwan, China, Malaysia and the Philippines — as well as anger over corruption, inequality and resource exploitation.

Chinese businesses were targeted partly because of allegations they and Taiwan — which at the time had diplomatic relations with Honiara — helped finance Rini to bribe legislators for support in the vote for prime minister. China had to charter planes to evacuate its citizens. Australia and New Zealand sent in peacekeeping troops to quell the unrest.

2019 diplomatic switch and riots

In 2019 the historical rivalry between Guadalcanal and Malaita converged with international geopolitics when veteran politician Manasseh Sogavare was elected prime minister, sparking another round of violent protests.

One of Sogavare's campaign platforms was to switch diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China, which he did five months later. Taiwan and China have been engaged for years in a diplomatic tug-of-war in developing countries, with economic support and other aid often used as bargaining chips for diplomatic recognition.

Sogavare's switch paved the way for unlocking huge amounts of Chinese investment but it was far from unanimously popular, particularly on Malaita where residents had benefited from Taiwanese aid projects and maintained deep links to Taipei. A plan to lease an entire island to a Chinese state-owned company — announced just days after the diplomatic switch — soon had to be abandoned because it was deeply unpopular.

Build-up to new crisis

The political violence that exploded this week is a continuation of all of the above. Writing in the Solomon Times, Transform Aqorau described it as "a culmination of a number of flashpoints that have been ignored", citing the China-Taiwan split, as well as tensions between the national and provincial governments.



HONIARA, Solomon Islands: This screengrab taken and received yesterday from a video from ZFM Radio shows parts of the Chinatown district on fire in Honiara on Solomon Islands, as rioters torched buildings in the capital in a second day of anti-government protests. —AFP

Island tensions

The Solomon Islands has struggled repeatedly with ethnic tensions and political violence since gaining independence from Britain in 1978. In the late 1990s Guadalcanal militants launched attacks on settlers, particularly targeting those from Malaita, and for five years unrest brought the country to its knees. The so-called Tensions only

eased with the deployment of an Australian-led peacekeeping mission named the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands. But Malaita residents continue to complain that their island is neglected by the central government. Since 2019 the feud has been turbocharged by a row over Sogavare's decision to abruptly break diplomatic relations with Taiwan and recognize Beijing. —AFP

Why rioters are burning and looting in the Solomon Islands

HONIARA, Solomon Islands: Angry riots that left buildings burning in the Solomon Islands capital yesterday are the latest flare-up in two decades of tensions in the Pacific nation that have often ensnared Chinese businesses. The recipe for the crisis is a complex mix of youth unemployment, anger over anti-coronavirus controls, historical inter-island rivalries and a festering dispute over whether the Solomon Islands should have switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China. Here are key facts to help explain events:

The Solomon Islands have struggled with inter-island tensions and political violence since gaining independence from Britain in 1978. The origins of the latest crisis date back to a period of civil unrest between 1998 and 2003 known as "The Tensions". Residents of the principal island of Guadalcanal had come to resent the influence of settlers from other islands, in particular Malaita, the most populous province. Guadalcanal militants launched attacks on settlers in 1998, giving way to five years of tit-for-tat sectarian unrest that brought the country to its knees. Peace was ultimately restored in 2003 by the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) made up of troops and police from Australia, New Zealand and 15 contributing Pacific nations. RAMSI maintained a presence until 2017 but even after their departure tensions were never far below the surface.

2006 Chinatown riots

Riots erupted in April 2006 after Snyder Rini was elected prime minister by legislators. Dozens of businesses owned by ethnic Chinese were looted



HONIARA, Solomon Islands: Smoke from burning buildings rise from Honiara on the Solomon Islands yesterday on the second day of rioting that left the capital ablaze and threatened to topple the Pacific nation's government. —AFP

Local reports say many of the protesters in Honiara this week had travelled from Malaita where anger had been growing over a perceived lack of central government investment and the decision to abandon Taiwan as an ally. "It was a planned peaceful protest... What's happened is that tensions have boiled over," Mihai Sora, an expert on the Pacific at Australia's Lowy Institute, said. Malaita premier Daniel Suidani had been a vocal critic of the switch in diplomatic recognition to Beijing.

Suidani has maintained ties with Taiwan, in defiance of central government instructions, Sora said. Earlier this year, he was treated in a hospital in Taiwan. Nicholas Coppel, a former Australian ambassador and RAMSI special coordinator, told AFP that most grievances in the Solomons "stem from feelings of inequality in the distribution of resources". —AFP

Lifestyle

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Augustus Mausoleum, testament to Roman civilization in heart of Rome

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A woman stands in front of an art installation displayed at the Expo 2020, in the Gulf Emirate of Dubai. —AFP





Augustus Mausoleum, testament to Roman civilization in heart of Rome

The Mausoleum of Augustus, built by Roman Emperor Octavian Augustus in the center of Rome 2,000 years ago, is a testament to Roman civilization and a glorification of his golden age, and serving as a burial place for success five emperors.

Emperor Augustus built the Mausoleum in 28 BC, following his victory over Queen

Cleopatra in the Battle of Actium, to be the largest round-shape tomb in the world. The 12-meter-high Mausoleum, with a base diameter of 90 meters, is constructed of white stone. A 45-meter-high cylinder shape, topped by Augustus statue built of gold-plated bronze, sits in the middle of the Mausoleum, located in Piazza Augusto Imperatore in Rome. —KUNA



Happy feet: Volunteer pedicurists help Hong Kong's elderly

Gently unwrapping clingfilm covering the old man's damaged feet—skin darkened and cracked, nails lumpy and deformed—the Hong Kong beautician doesn't flinch. Instead she picks up her tools and starts working. Once to twice a month, Cass Ng and her team of beauticians swap out their nail polish collection for tough scissors, nail files, an electric drill. Her initiative CHANGE (Caring Health Anywhere Nails Goal Elderly) offers free pedicures for low-income elderly people who cannot afford healthcare and do not have family to fall back on. "We want to serve these people the most because they lack others' love the most," the 37-year-old told AFP.

After three years of giving volunteer manicures, Ng was inspired to start her own social enterprise to help those—often over 65 and on social benefits—unable to afford the city's expensive private healthcare. While Hong Kong has a public healthcare system, many complain they have to wait for long periods to be seen with various ailments getting worse.



Nail salon owner Cass Ng (back center) helping an elderly man before giving him a pedicure.

One of those visiting Ng's free clinic for the first time was Martin Sun, 71, who said he had been troubled by ingrowing toenails and fungal infections for years. He describes that day's treatment, a full pedicure, as a blessed relief. "If not, I would do it myself, bend down, then take a deep breath, and endure the pain," he said of trying to do the same work himself. Kwan Lung, 86, gave a thumbs up and beamed during her visit to the clinic at the Kwai Chung community center. "The more they (the manicurists) come, the happier we old people are," the grandmother explained.

She described "sweating like it's raining" when she tried her own pedicures before. Although the day seems light-hearted, Ng explains, when the elderly don't treat their fungal nail infections—the most common problem—they can face difficulties walking. "Slowly, they might tend not to go out and they will become lonelier," she said. "If the nails are fixed, they feel more comfortable with their feet and can... take a walk and chat with friends." "When you manicure, the smell and level of dirtiness are very difficult to accept," she said, describing how difficult it was to help one man who was particularly filthy.

"But after half a year to a year, his situation has changed," she said. Ng said: "This service should not be just a small thing in community centers, but a service that might be needed by people from all Hong Kong," adding that she hoped everyone could one day be set on equal footing.—AFP



This photo shows a woman (right) thanking volunteer manicurists for giving pedicures to elderly people at a community center for the elderly in Hong Kong as part of a charity initiative. —AFP photos



Nail salon owner Cass Ng (left) giving an elderly woman a pedicure.



A volunteer manicurist giving a pedicure to a low-income elderly lady.



Nail salon owner Cass Ng (center left) waiting to give a pedicure at a community center for the elderly.



An employee walks past a screen showing late British singer Amy Winehouse during a photocall for the “Amy: Beyond the Stage” exhibition at the Design Museum in London. —AFP photos



Pictures of late British singer Amy Winehouse taken by photographers Jake Chessum, Karen Robinson and Phil Knott are displayed.

Amy Winehouse exhibition opens at London museum

A new exhibition opens in London this week exploring the life, music and legacy of British singer-songwriter Amy Winehouse, a decade after her death aged just 27. The Design Museum’s “Amy: Beyond the Stage” tracks the story of her early career through her recordings and teenage notebooks to give an insight into her creativity. It also pays tribute to her eclectic mix of influences, from “Queen of the Blues” Dinah Washington to DJ and record mogul Mark Ronson, 1960s pop, Motown and jazz. The exhibition’s assistant curator Maria McLintock said Winehouse, who died of alcohol poisoning in July 2011, had left a rich and varied legacy in music and fashion.

“What we’ve tried to do is tell her story as a creative person, as an incredible musician, as a fashion icon, but also include rare objects that maybe her fans have heard of but they haven’t seen before,” she said. Exhibits include hand-written lyrics from unreleased demos and the first guitar she bought as a teenager. Winehouse, a distinctive figure with her beehive hairdo, multiple tattoos and smoky voice, shot to international fame with the 2006 album “Back to Black”. The album—a 2007 best-seller in the UK—included the track “Rehab”, charting her battle with addiction. McLintock told AFP that as well as portraying Winehouse as a “very refined musician”, the decade since her death was also a

way to assess her significance and influence.

In a sign of the sustained interest in her life and work, the dress she wore at her final performance sold for \$243,200 (217,199 euros) at auction earlier this month — 16 times its estimated value. “Something that’s been really lovely to see is that there are many younger people who would not have grown up with Amy who are so excited to come to this exhibition,” McLintock added. “So she’s clearly, continually inspiring younger artists.” Winehouse’s father, Mitch, on Wednesday helped launch the show, which opens to the public today. —AFP



Mitch Winehouse (left), father of late British singer Amy Winehouse, and curator Priya Khanchandan pose in front of dresses worn by the singer during a photocall.



Mitch Winehouse, father of late British singer Amy Winehouse, poses during a photocall.



A guitar signed by late British singer Amy Winehouse is displayed.



Photo shows Mitch Winehouse (right), father of late British singer Amy Winehouse, and curator Priya Khanchandan.



In this Handout photo Omaze CEO and co-founder Matt Pohlson (left), Sir Richard Branson (second left), Keisha S (second right), and Space For Humanity executive director Rachel Lyons (right) pose for a photo after the sweepstakes announcement in Antigua. —AFP photos

Mother from Caribbean wins two tickets on Virgin Galactic space flight

Space tourism company Virgin Galactic on Wednesday announced a mother from the Caribbean won two tickets on a flight into Earth's orbit, worth \$450,000 each. Keisha Schahaff, a health and energy coach, said she wanted to take the flight into orbit with her 17-year-old daughter, a science student living in Britain who dreams of one day working for NASA. Virgin Galactic founder Richard Branson surprised Schahaff with the news at her home in Antigua in early November. "I just thought I was doing a zoom interview," she told AFP.

"When I saw Richard Branson walking in I just started screaming! I couldn't believe it." "I always was interested in space as a little girl," she added. "This is a great opportunity for me to feel alive and to just make the greatest adventure ever." Schahaff won the prize after entering a fundraiser lottery organized by Virgin Galactic on the Omaze platform, which raised \$1.7 million. The money will be donated to the NGO Space for Humanity, which works

for wider access to space. The amount she donated was not made public, but entry started with a minimum contribution of \$10.

The drive attracted nearly 165,000 participants in eight weeks, Virgin Galactic said in a statement. "Being able to give people of all ages and backgrounds equal access to space, and in turn, the opportunity to lead and inspire others back on Earth, is what Virgin Galactic has been building towards for the past two decades," said Branson. The British septuagenarian flew in his company's test mission to space in July, beating by a matter of days Blue Origin owner Jeff Bezos in their billionaire space race. Schahaff will be among the first of Virgin Galactic's space tourists, but her place in the line has yet to be determined, a company spokesperson said. Virgin Galactic has already pre-sold some 700 space tickets: 600 between 2005 and 2014, and another 100 since August, when they were relisted for a price of \$450,000. —AFP



Keisha S

Offbeat biopic 'Aline' panned by Celine Dion siblings

Celine Dion's brother and sister have trashed the offbeat biopic "Aline: The Voice of Love," inspired by the singer's rise from child stardom to queen of soft rock and set to be released in theatres in her native Canada today. "I don't recognize the language, I don't recognize my family, I don't recognize our roots," Claudette Dion, the Grammy-Award winner's sister, told popular Quebec radio show "La Semaine des 4 Julie" Tuesday evening. She and brother Michel Dion, who appeared as guests on the show, said the "humor misses the mark," several scenes "went too far" and they accused Valerie Lemerrier, who directs and stars in the film, of wildly distorting their famous sibling's life and personality.

"My mother never spoke like that to Rene (Celine's husband), and Celine never wanted for anything. We pass for a gang of classless grumps," she commented. Rene Angelil was Celine Dion's manager from 1981, when she was 12 years old and he was 38, until two years before his death in 2016. They married in 1994. Critics at Cannes where the film had its world premier in July were divided over whether this unpretentious account of the Canadian megastar was a "sincere and moving homage" or "so pointless as a film that you can only see it as an extravagant piece of conceptual art." The film-makers said then that they tweaked the star's name to Aline Dieu to give them some wriggle room over the details of her story, though claimed it hews closely to Dion's real life and songs.

"The film we saw, Claudette and I, is not exactly what we expected," said Michel Dion, who has accompanied Celine Dion on tour for 30 years as a stage manager. "That's not our life," added Claudette, seated next to him at the studio. On Sunday, Lemerrier revealed to the local television talk show "Tout le monde en parle" that she'd never met Celine Dion, but has become a big fan. She said she tried to make the film "touching and funny like her." "I hope she will see the care we have all taken to pay tribute to her," she said, adding that she hoped "that one day she will see it and that it will please her." —AFP





Bee conservationist Filipe Salbany climbs an oak tree to survey a honeybee colony in the High Park on the Blenheim Estate in Oxfordshire. —AFP photos

Rare wild bees find has English country estate buzzing

Hanging halfway up an ancient oak tree, peering into a small, dark hole in its enormous trunk abuzz with bees, Filipe Salbany can barely contain himself. “Amazing—the queen’s laying!” the 55-year-old shouts down, as he dangles around 15 meters (just under 50 feet) above the grounds of Blenheim Estate, secured by ropes and a harness. “This is a real classroom. This is fantastic. Unbelievable!” The South African conservationist has spent much of the last 18 months scouring for hives in the ancient woodlands of the estate, near Oxford, in south central England. His unbridled enthusiasm stems from his belief that these are no ordinary bees.

He has identified them as a rare ecotype—a distinct form of a species, occupying a particular habitat—with a suspected centuries-old lineage in the self-contained corner of the Oxfordshire countryside. DNA tests are now under way to confirm the finding, but the potential discovery of wild descendants of so-called native bees has Blenheim and beyond buzzing with excitement. It was thought such populations had largely disappeared due to disease, pesticides and competition with foreign imports. Salbany believes their continued existence has global implications. “If we can do this in more ancient woodland, different countries, if we can find local subspecies of bees... we can learn so much more about the environment and improve agricultural systems,” he told AFP from his tree perch.

“Whether it’s Romania, Bulgaria, France, we need to look at the species that are surviving and understand the factors that are affecting the bees, whether it’s chemicals, pesticides, human intervention. “We can stop mixing all the different lineages of bees and get fewer die-offs and once you start getting fewer die-offs, we can keep a population at good levels.”

‘Exceeded expectations’

Bees are an indispensable part of the natural environment, pollinating the majority of the food we eat. But Salbany argues that managed honeybee populations have been overly colonized to serve human consumption needs. This has had negative environ-

mental impacts, he says, from stressing out the bees, to outcompeting other insects. “The honeybee has developed a hero status... but we’ve commercialized something that should not be commercialized,” he said. Meanwhile, indigenous bee populations are under threat around the world. In Britain, where most bees are imports found in managed hives, it is estimated that one-third of the wild population has disappeared over recent decades, decimated in particular by the varroa mite.

The Blenheim bees appear unaffected by this, leading Salbany to suspect they have evolved to live with the parasite, among other adaptations. Blenheim, home to a World Heritage Site palace and centuries of heritage, boasts the biggest collection of ancient oak trees in Europe in its thousands of acres (hectares) of largely untouched woodlands. With large tracts off-limits to the public, and no managed hives or agricultural production using pesticides on-



Bee conservationist Filipe Salbany climbs an oak tree to survey a honeybee colony in the High Park.



Honeybees are seen in a colony located in a Ash tree in High Park on the Blenheim Estate in Oxfordshire.



Honeybees are seen in a colony located in a Ash tree in High Park on the Blenheim Estate.

site, it has provided the perfect environment for the ecotype. Salbany, a physiologist and former international cyclist who also coaches elite athletes when not hunting for bees, began researching there with minimal expectations.

To his surprise, he has now counted nearly 50 hives in trees and estimates as many as 500 could exist across Blenheim’s woodlands, remarkably surviving during winter. “It’s hugely exceeded my expectations,” he said during a recent tour of the woods, which includes oaks up to 600 years old and bee nests that may date back two centuries. “Sadly, there aren’t a lot of other places like this.”

Unique

The Blenheim bees are smaller, furrier and darker than those typically found in managed UK hives, and living their best untouched lives, according to Salbany. “It’s a bee without the stresses of pesticides, chemicals, surviving,” he explained. “It’s survived over a long period of time in its native environment—that’s what’s critical.” Nick Baimbridge, head of Blenheim’s forestry department, said discovering that the bees he had barely noticed during his three decades working there were special was a big surprise. “We’d never paid that much attention until Filipe’s come along and highlighted the fact that this is very unique,” he added.

Baimbridge noted his team would continue to let the ecosystem thrive on its own. “They’ve obviously been here for decades so we might as well carry on with what we’ve been doing.” Salbany is awaiting the DNA sample results to confirm the precise lineage of the Blenheim bees, but reports about his findings have already stirred interest. Rob Stoneman, of the Wildlife Trusts charity, called the discovery “remarkable.” “It shows the value and complexity of our ancient woodlands and the need to protect these unique habitats in perpetuity,” he told AFP. Stoneman said it reinforced the importance of creating more wild places, citing the Trust’s campaign to protect and connect at least 30 percent of Britain’s land and sea for nature by 2030. “If we can do that, discoveries like this could become commonplace—our gift to future generations.” —AFP

Lifestyle | Feature

Russian caviar prices surge ahead of holidays



Vendors offer salmon fish eggs, also known as red caviar in Russia, at a marketplace in Moscow. —AFP photos

Russians looking to indulge in their traditional winter holiday treat of red caviar will be disappointed this year as prices have hit historic highs, official figures showed. With Russia battling surging inflation, state statistics agency Rosstat said the market price for one kilogram of red fish roe has surpassed the 5,000 ruble (\$68, 60 euro) mark, the highest price since monitoring began in 2000. Caviar with butter on bread or pancakes is typically served for dinner on New Year's Eve, Russia's biggest annual holiday. Over the course of the last two decades, the price of caviar at the end of the year has increased by seven times.

Prices jumped this year contrary to expectations and despite

an increase in salmon fishing, most of which is carried out on the Kamchatka peninsula in Russia's Far East. Salmon fishing has been up 30 percent since January compared to the same period last year, according to the Federal Fishery Agency cited by news agency TASS. Business daily RBC reported that prices are being raised by producers—with the whole market concentrated in the hands of 10-15 companies in the Far East—ahead of the holiday rush. Rising inflation has led to a surge in food prices in Russia, like in other countries where economies are quickly recovering from the pandemic. In October, the inflation rate in Russia reached 8.1 percent year-on-year, a record since 2016 —AFP



Salmon fish eggs, also known as red caviar in Russia, are pictured.



A vendor offers salmon fish eggs.



Salmon fish eggs, also known as red caviar in Russia, are pictured at a marketplace in Moscow.

Croatia's truffle hunters seek habitat protection amid climate change



An aerial picture shows a view of the town of Motovun and the forest in the middle of Istria peninsula which has long been famed for producing some of the finest white truffles. —AFP photos



Ivan Vukadonovic walks with his dogs while hunting for white truffles in the forest near the Istrian town of Motovun.



A basket with fresh truffles at "Zigante" truffle factory.

The sound of paws scurrying along the forest floor echoes through Croatia's northwestern woods, where the hunt for truffles is being threatened by climate change and deforestation—stirring fears that the country's gastronomic goldmine may be at risk. The delicate microclimate in the picturesque Istria peninsula's forests has long been famed for producing some of the finest white truffles, which this year fetched up to 2,500 euros (\$2,860) per kilo.

But the increase in temperatures and lower precipitation levels linked to climate change along with a shrinking water table and habitat loss could throw off the natural incubator that pro-

duces the luxurious ingredient. "It's more difficult to find a truffle than to sell it," laments Darko Muzica, who oversees the Istra association of truffle hunters, an advocacy group campaigning to protect the peninsula's white truffle. Along with climate change and diminishing water tables, Muzica says poor forest management has also threatened future harvests, with officials giving preferential treatment to the timber industry.

A 2014 study on Istria's truffles issued a similar warning, saying: "throughout the world the productivity of natural truffle habitats is shrinking which is often linked with climate change but also the ways the land is used". Truffle enthusiasts say im-

mediate action is needed to protect the area's habitat. "The whole region would benefit from it," says Ivan Vukadinovic, who is also a member of the truffle hunter association.

'Top quality'

Fears over the truffle's future in Istria comes on the heels of a decades-long love affair with the culinary delight in Croatia. Istria has long been a tourist hotspot in the Balkan nation, famed for its pristine coastline as well as island getaways but has often been overshadowed on the truffle front by neighbouring Italy across the Adriatic.



An employee adds stickers on jars containing truffle products at Zigante truffle factory.



An employee works on the production line at Zigante truffle factory.



This picture shows a plaster cast of a 1.31 kg truffle, that has been listed in the Guinness Book of World Records, in a truffle shop in the Istrian town of Motovun.

With money to be made, truffle hunters, accompanied by teams of specially trained dogs, comb through Istria's dense, lowland forests near Motovun hoping to strike white gold. "Search! Search!" shouts forest scientist Zeljko Zgrablic as his two dogs paw at the ground near a suspected bulb. After digging away a layer of topsoil, Zgrablic carefully extracts a white truffle weighing some 20 grams—which could net up to 130 euros (\$145). It is a typical scene during Istria's white truffle season that runs from September to late December, attracting a wide swath of aficionados ranging from weekend warriors to locals hoping to pocket extra cash.

Istria remains one of the few areas outside of Italy's famed Alba region able to produce high-end white truffles thanks to its humid climate and alkaline soil that imbues the edible fungi with a strong aroma and optimal density. "They are heavy, have a good shape... which makes them a top quality product," says Zgrablic as he carefully writes down details of the truffle.

"Truffle land"

The first written reference to truffles in Istria dates back to the late 1920s, when the peninsula was then part of Italy. But the industry has gone into overdrive in the past two decades, with the sector netting millions of dollars annually—spurring Istria to rebrand itself as "truffle land". The truffle rush started after the discovery of a bulb weighing 1.31 kilograms (2.88 pounds) that was listed for a time in the Guinness Book of World Records.

"The event started a truffle avalanche," says Giancarlo Zigante, a former hunter and restaurateur, who now produces hundreds of locally sourced truffle products—including oil, chocolate and chips that are exported to dozens of countries worldwide. Hoping to protect the area's lucrative truffle trade, the local association of truffle hunters has begun campaigning for "protected designation of origin" within the European Union. If granted, it



An aerial picture shows a view of the forest near the town of Motovun in the middle of Istria peninsula which has long been famed for producing some of the finest white truffles.



A forest scientist and field mycologist who samples truffles Zeljko Zgrablic, helped by his dog, searches white truffle.

says the certification would help provide better management of the region's forests by eliminating their "irrational devastation", while also guaranteeing the truffle's authenticity and helping raise awareness for preservation efforts. But for many enthusiasts, pre-



A picture shows jars at "Zigante" truffle factory in the Istrian town of Plovanija.

serving the area's habitat is about protecting the simple pleasures that come with truffle hunts. "It's a lifestyle, it gets under your skin," Muzica says. "The dog is happy whenever I'm happy. And I'm happy when my dog finds a truffle." —AFP



Pictures show jars at a truffle shop in the Istrian town of Motovun, Croatia.

Kids Page

Word Search

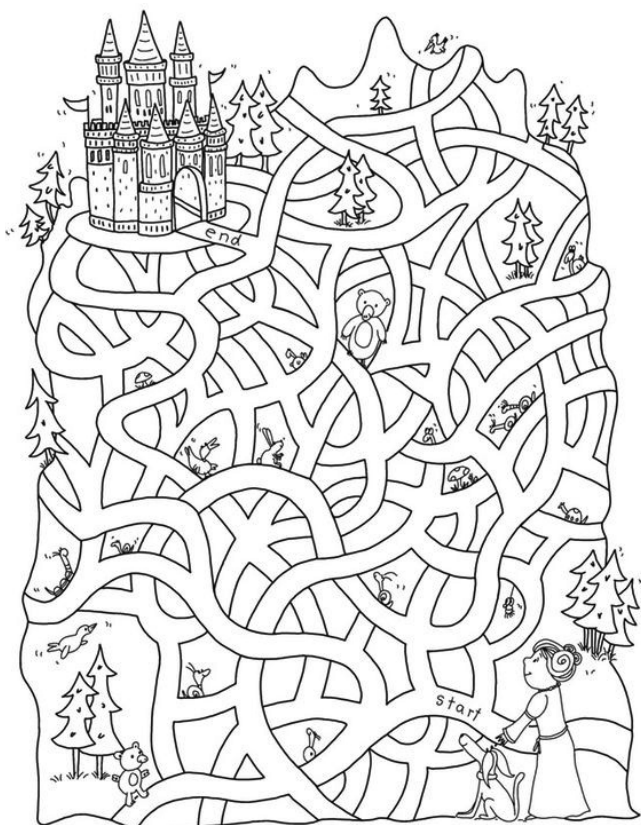
1950's Songs

Find and circle all of the 1950's song titles that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell the title of an additional 1950's song.

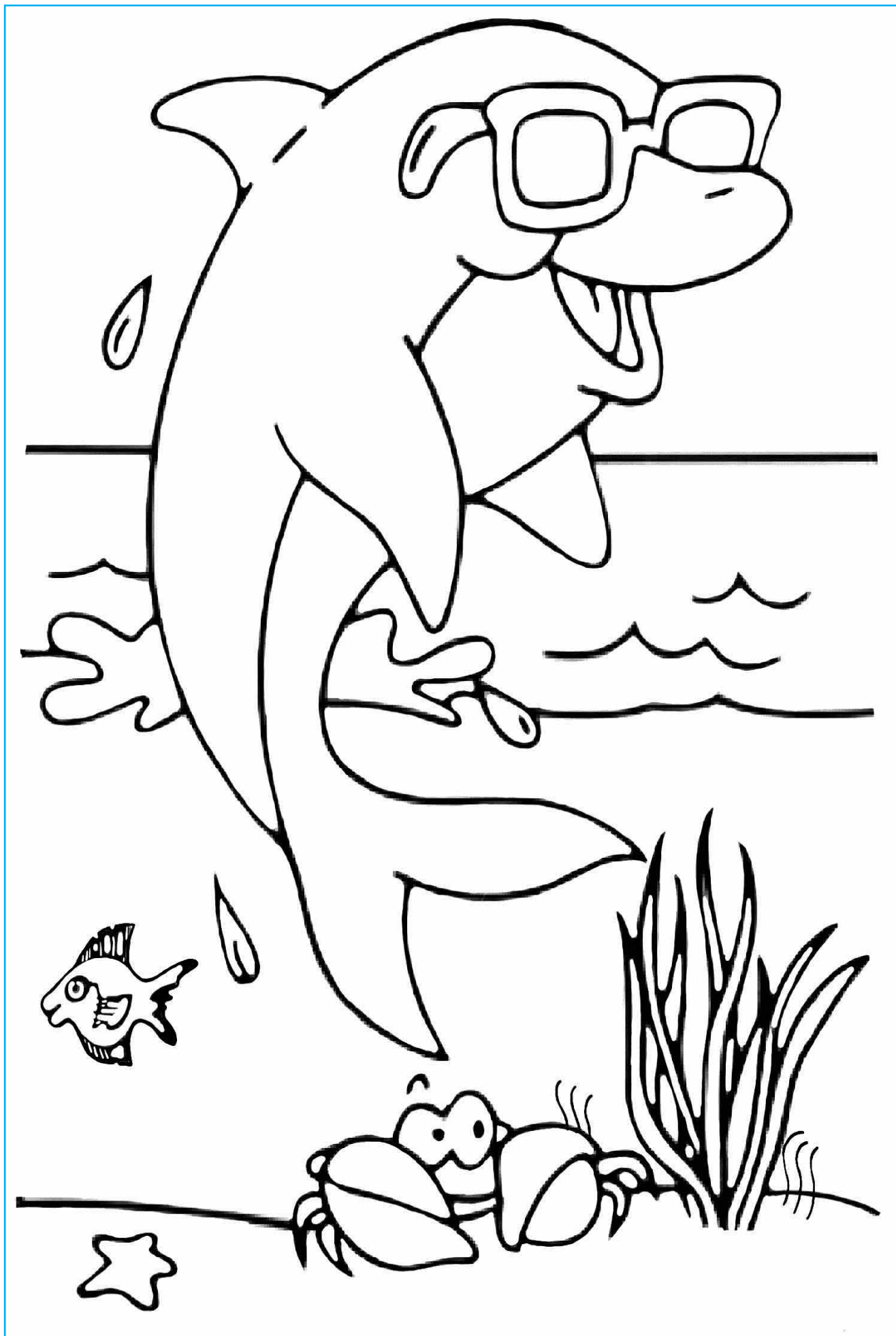
R A V E O N I A R T Y R E T S Y M L I
 D Y T S I M H O N K Y T O N K L E O L
 O G N A J D A N I H C R A E S T N N E
 N V L O N E L Y T E A R D R O P S L Y
 N B E E Y R M M B T L S Q H G E H Y E
 A L T F O A O D A E M B K E J U O Y L
 S U O T I V D K N R L A M A I I U O D
 N E O N E N E Y A E E L I U T Z T U D
 O B Y I G F K Y R R S L E T R M U K I
 T E T A I T Z E B E H U U N E A A S D
 N R T V K A A T H O V R O U E N S H O
 E R E R E R L U T F E S Y S N I O B
 E Y E C Q A T S L I K Y F A O I L U A
 T H F D E U E Y T S G C S T D S A N B
 X I H H R I T Y G A C A I E H N D M
 I L S W O O U L E A I L O M E B O D A
 S L R C L T T P A T K D L A P O M O B
 L I K E V O L E Y B E Y B Y S Y V G A
 R I P I T U P E N I G H T T R A I N L

- | | | | |
|------------------|------------------|---------------|--------------|
| BLUEBERRY HILL | HOUND DOG | MONA LISA | SEARCHIN' |
| BO DIDDLEY | JAILHOUSE ROCK | MOVE IT | SHOUT |
| BYE BYE LOVE | KANSAS CITY | MYSTERY TRAIN | SIXTEEN TONS |
| CRAZY ARMS | LA BAMBA | NIGHT TRAIN | SPEEDO |
| DJANGO | LONELY TEARDROPS | ONLY YOU | SUZIE Q |
| DONNA | LONG TALL SALLY | PEGGY SUE | TAKE FIVE |
| EVERYDAY | MACK THE KNIFE | RAVE ON | TEQUILA |
| FEVER | MANNISH BOY | RED HOT | TUTTI FRUTTI |
| HEARTBREAK HOTEL | MAYBELLENE | RIP IT UP | YAKETY YAK |
| HONKY TONK | MISTY | RUMBLE | YOU SEND ME |

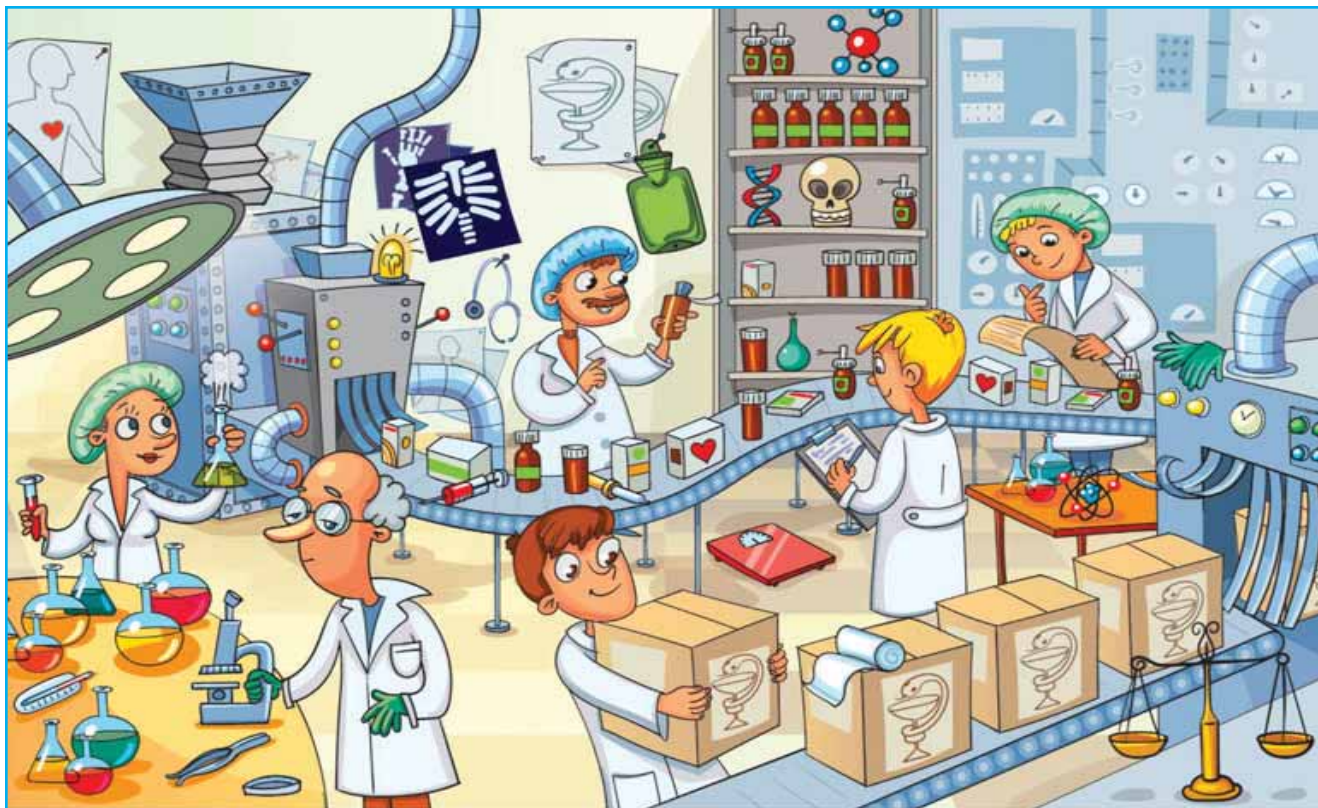
Kids Mazes



Color It



Find the objects



Find 15 objects in the picture



LYUDMYLA KHARLAMOVA/SHUTTERSTOCK

Word Scramble

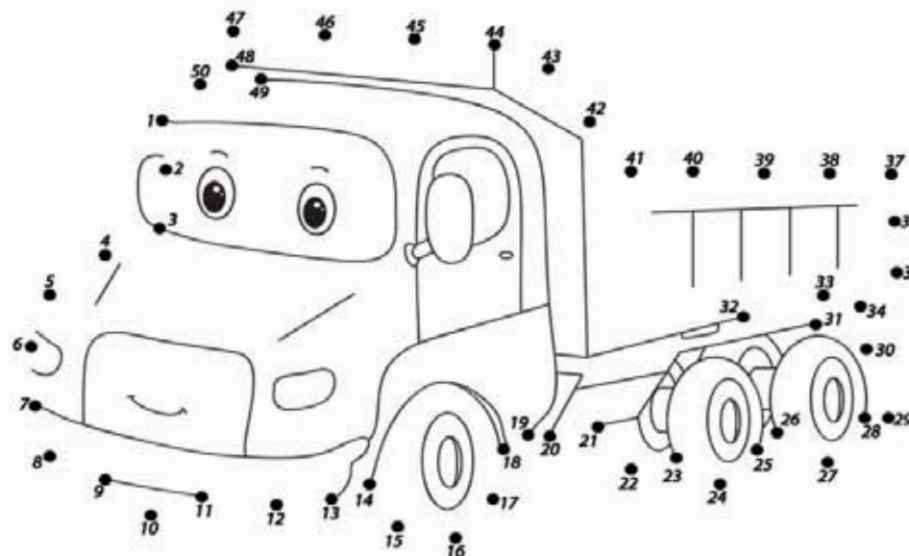


Computer Terms Word Scramble

Help! The school computer had its memory scrambled and we need your help to get things back in order. Can you unscramble the computer terms and write the correct word on each line?

- | | | | |
|----------|-------|----------|-------|
| EITRRNE | _____ | KEERSAP | _____ |
| SAEHRC | _____ | UADOLP | _____ |
| LLCORS | _____ | NTERPRI | _____ |
| BOKEDYRA | _____ | IONC | _____ |
| UNMSAERE | _____ | SOTWRFEA | _____ |
| VSIRU | _____ | NLDDWOAO | _____ |
| EVRSER | _____ | SOEUM | _____ |
| FOTN | _____ | RSDAWSPQ | _____ |
| MONORIT | _____ | EACCH | _____ |
| EENSRC | _____ | YEAGBTIG | _____ |
| HAKCRE | _____ | FODRLE | _____ |
| WSREROB | _____ | OEMUDNTC | _____ |

Join the dots



Business

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2021

32 Mazda's first full electric car arrives in the region

33 Coronavirus gloom weighs on German shoppers: Survey

33 New Huawei nova 9: Trendy flagship and camera king!

34 Respite for Biden as US layoff wave ebbs, spending ramps up



Flash mob thefts terrorize US retailers

Retailers around the country take precautions as holiday season begins

WASHINGTON: US retailers are adding security and locking up goods after flash mob heists involving dozens of thieves at once stunned luxury stores in the San Francisco area and beyond, as the holiday shopping season opens. In the most shocking of recent thefts, around 80 masked people in 25 cars raided a high-end Nordstrom department store in Walnut Creek, California east of San Francisco on Saturday, plundering its first-floor luxury goods counters in just a few minutes before fleeing.

That took place one day after 40 people drove up and swarmed a Louis Vuitton store in San Francisco's Union Square, emptying its shelves in seconds before jumping in cars to speed away. And near Chicago, also hit by a series of similar thefts, a gang of 14 crooks swept into a Louis Vuitton store in the Oak Brook suburb, snatching more than \$100,000 worth of luxury bags and garments. It was the third such attack on a Chicago-area Vuitton outlet in a month.

Retailers around the country are taking notice and precautions against possible copycat hits as the sheer size of the robbery gangs and their ability to plan secretly have made them nearly impossible to halt. "The level of organized retail theft we are seeing is simply unacceptable," California Governor Gavin Newsom said Tuesday. "Businesses and customers should feel safe while doing their holiday shopping."

The thefts come at a key moment on the shopping calendar. Yesterday was Thanksgiving, and the day after the holiday has been nicknamed "Black Friday," the traditional kickoff to America's frenzied Christmas shopping season. Newsom ordered a special task force in the California Highway Patrol to work with local officials to address the theft problem.

Despite the action, the number of flash mob thefts multiplied, with a jewelry store in Hayward near San Francisco hit by a group of between 30 and 40.

In nearby Oakland a streetwear store was cleaned out: security video shows more than 30 masked, hooded people squeezing into the small shop, grabbing collectable shoes and garb and rushing out in under a minute. Flash mob thefts, also dubbed "flash robs," have been around for years, but have accelerated in 2021, besetting owners of small pharmacies, mid-level chain clothing stores and top-end luxury goods alike.

But the sheer size and speed of the Nordstrom attack in Walnut Creek stunned many.

"I wouldn't even characterize that as organized crime, that



CHELSEA, US: A whole turkey is placed into a shopping bag before being placed into a cart at the La Colaborativa Food Pantry in Chelsea, Massachusetts on Wednesday. — AFP

was domestic terrorism," Rachel Michelin, president of the California Retailers Association told Fox40 television in Sacramento.

Jeffrey Ian Ross, a criminologist at the University of Baltimore, said there is nothing indicating that overall retail theft in the country has risen significantly. But he said the spread of video footage of the heists on news and social media may have inspired others to copy them.

"It's brazen, it's graphic," he said. Ross said that police, already burdened by rising murder cases and other violent crime, "just can't keep up" with the volume of stolen goods and the people who resell them. What remained unclear are the ties if any between the multiple group thefts in the San Francisco

area, how the participants communicate and coordinate, and how any organized fencing operation might work.

Only three people have been confirmed arrested in the Walnut Creek robbery, out of the estimated 80-plus people who took part. On Tuesday San Francisco District Attorney Chesa Boudin announced felony charges against nine people in store robberies, including the Louis Vuitton store in Union Square.

Michelin, though, said that California could need tougher laws against this kind of crime, where social media appears to be used to coordinate the culprits. "We're going to have those uncomfortable conversations and have a look at some of the laws on the books," she told Fox40. "Obviously they aren't working." — AFP

PREMIER MARKET WEEKLY TECHNICAL BULLETIN

WEEK ENDED ON 25 NOVEMBER 2021

No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	1038	1017	1039	1010	29	14,604,972	-19	-1.83%	21.07%	1011	1024	24.7	2.19	1.8%	1.27
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	262	254	263	253	10	43,741,209	-10	-3.79%	15.98%	253	256	23.1	1.20	1.9%	1.13
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	224	220	225	218	7	25,275,633	-5	-2.22%	5.77%	218	222	NM	0.96	0.0%	1.01
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	229	226	230	225	5	14,419,236	-2	-0.88%	6.10%	225	230	20.3	1.04	1.9%	1.05
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	845	834	845	833	12	21,030,654	-12	-1.42%	23.19%	833	842	36.4	3.76	1.1%	1.40
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	813	795	820	784	36	4,024,507	-23	-2.81%	39.96%	793	803	65.3	4.67	0.0%	1.05
204	National Investments	Financial Services	237	231	251	231	20	21,568,816	-7	-2.94%	71.11%	224	237	8.3	1.07	4.3%	1.25
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	142	151	156	141	15	20,614,596	9	6.34%	-5.03%	147	153	NM	1.46	3.3%	0.58
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	125	123	126	122	4	11,115,597	-3	-2.38%	9.82%	123	131	NM	0.75	0.0%	0.98
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	184	180	193	177	16	54,112,865	-4	-2.17%	65.14%	177	187	34.9	1.32	0.0%	0.97
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	838	800	838	798	40	3,046,015	-38	-4.53%	21.77%	790	809	20.2	1.88	0.7%	1.11
501	National Industries	Financial Services	283	279	284	271	14	17,336,597	-5	-1.76%	58.52%	272	281	7.2	1.04	0.0%	1.44
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	980	955	983	952	31	714,619	-27	-2.75%	26.49%	950	970	35.8	1.08	5.2%	0.94
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	925	900	927	898	29	1,986,645	-33	-3.54%	40.63%	900	915	25.6	2.12	5.9%	0.72
526	Al Qurain	Basic Materials	371	360	375	358	17	2,425,857	-11	-2.96%	6.51%	357	371	28.9	0.95	4.2%	0.75
603	Agility	Industrials	1,044	997	1,045	994	51	18,331,634	-46	-4.41%	47.49%	995	1020	29.0	1.90	0.9%	1.48
605	Zain	Telecommunications	596	590	598	590	8	12,120,416	-6	-1.01%	-2.64%	589	599	13.6	2.21	3.4%	1.35
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,301	3,250	3,310	3,220	90	1,588,929	-30	-0.91%	-14.45%	3200	3300	5.9	3.74	12.2%	0.49
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	247	244	247	240	7	6,713,080	-3	-1.21%	12.96%	241	246	NM	0.78	0.0%	0.87
818	Ahli United Bank	Banking	292	285	292	281	11	36,231,909	-8	-2.73%	25.55%	282	290	21.1	2.29	1.3%	1.13
821	Warba Bank	Banking	294	287	297	276	21	24,518,975	-6	-2.12%	21.61%	286	278	21.6	2.89	0.0%	1.00
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	615	602	615	602	13	3,174,671	-13	-2.11%	-0.99%	601	618	19.0	1.72	2.9%	0.44
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	387	385	398	378	20	7,987,236	-2	-0.52%	5.19%	380	388	NM	1.61	0.0%	0.47
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	238	239	240	236	4	3,021,453	0	0.00%	-13.72%	238	243	20.7	5.00	5.0%	0.65
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	1,945	1,893	1,950	1,892	58	1,890,384	-56	-2.87%	72.09%	1872	1925	13.6	7.22	2.1%	0.75

* As of end of week closing

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Business

Mazda's first full electric car in the region

MX-30 SUV combines all the benefits of Mazda's electrification technology

Carrefour reveals top ten hottest deals up for grabs during Friday promotions

KUWAIT: Carrefour, owned and operated by Majid Al-Futtaim in Kuwait, has revealed its top ten unmissable deals, alongside its exclusive and limited time offers during its Carrefour Friday promotions. From now until December 5, customers can seize the opportunity to save both online and in-store as they shop a range of rewarding offers across multiple product categories. The ten unbeatable deals available today are:

1. The most sought out category is baby care where customers can benefit up to 50 per cent off on items such as Pampers.
2. Popular among many, frozen products from Sadia are now available at a discounted price with up to 25 per cent off.
3. People's favorite brands such as L'Oreal and Garnier were eager to be part of Carrefour's Friday Promotions, and now anyone can purchase skin care products with a discount of up to 25 per cent.
4. Guided by its close shopper-behavior observations, Carrefour recognized that items from the food cupboard category are popular among shoppers. That is why these products will have a discounted deal of 50 per cent off.
5. Items from the essential category section, such as cleaning and household, will also be awarded a 55 per cent discount.
6. Carrefour is known for its spontaneous flash deals, so customers should watch out to catch the chocolate category on sale, where they can benefit from a 40 per cent discount on the third Friday of the promotions.
7. There is something for everyone during Carrefour Friday Promotions, that is why mobile accessories will be discounted up to 40 per cent off for enthusiastic tech lovers.
8. The excitement does not stop as kitchen and dining products will have a 40 per cent discount.
9. Essentials such as fresh food of the highest quality will be discounted at 60 per cent, with Carrefour being able to fulfill every customer's needs.
10. Lastly, electronics such as TVs, and both small and large appliances will have a discount of up to 30 per cent off.

For the duration of the promotion, Carrefour has carefully selected important categories to give customers access to products they love and consider essential. Anyone can benefit from the offers available, with Carrefour continuing to provide a convenient, tech-driven shopping experience through its online store and the MAF Carrefour app.

Every year the brand focuses on delivering exceptional value to customers through every experience by providing access to the best quality products. Carrefour not only understands its customers but also makes sure it can help them save whenever possible without compromising on the high-quality standards.

KUWAIT: Kuwait Automotive Imports Company, Kaico Al Shaya & Al Sagar, the authorized distributors of Mazda cars in Kuwait is delighted to announce the arrival of the first Mazda EV the MX 30 in the region. Mazda's first all-electric vehicle is the MX-30 SUV, combines all the benefits of Mazda's electrification technology with a rotary generator to charge the battery, providing more range for even more enjoyment behind the wheel.

Embodying an expanded expression of our Kodo design, the Mazda MX-30 has been meticulously sculpted into a simple yet stunning form. It features a pillarless freestyle door system, providing a greater sense of openness and a wide range of possibilities for experiencing the vehicle. The MX-30 brings together intricate detailing, select materials and the latest technology to create an interior that feels open and inviting. Our commitment to the environment, and to comfort and craftsmanship, is evident in the unique use of cork, recycled fabrics and other sustainable materials.

Mazda's electrification technology offers a smooth and seamless performance while directly responding to the driver's intentions. In addition, the electric G-Vectoring Control Plus delivers precise and responsive steering to form a strong connection between car and driver. Ashish Tandon, General Manager of KAICO (Kuwait Automotive Imports Co WLL - Alshaya & Alsagar) stated, "We at KAICO are thrilled to be the first in region to have the Mazda MX 30 EV the perfect companion for your daily commute." Waleed Alqahtani, Mazda Brand Manager of KAICO stated, "Team KAICO is enthusiastic on trying and testing the all new Mazda MX 30 EV. We are looking forward to adding new products, technologies, and experiences to meet and exceed our customers' expectations."



Peugeot Kuwait launches lease to own financing campaign

KUWAIT: Kuwait Automotive Imports Company, launched vehicle lease to own campaign for Peugeot customers. KAICO has initiated a marketing campaign to drive Kuwait's shift from car ownership to usership for its European brand Peugeot in Q4.

According to the latest market figures car leasing is the fastest-growing form of new car finance for consumers. Peugeot Kuwait is championing this behavioral shift by offering customers com-

petitive rates for all the Peugeot line-up.

"The new car finance market is changing, and we're changing with it. With this campaign we're aiming at providing customers with the opportunity to experience the fantastic Peugeot range at affordable monthly rates," says KAICO general manager Ashish Tandon.

Building on the success of the Peugeot 508 and Peugeot 2008, KAICO aims to attract an even wider customer group to its technologically advanced vehicles in Q4. "Traditionally leasing has been the reserve of businesses, not the general public. We want to change that. We're launching with the campaign on both passenger and commercial vehicles. Leasing offers certainty in uncertain times. We want everyone to know that leasing a new car is a simple, affordable option for everybody to consider, with rates that will appeal to a wide audience, starting from KD 119 per month" added Peugeot Business Manager, Stefan Craita.



Coronavirus gloom weighs on German shoppers: Survey

German economy weaker than expected in third quarter

BERLIN: German shoppers are feeling downbeat as the December Christmas period beckons, a key survey said yesterday, with concerns about soaring coronavirus infections and higher prices gnawing away at festive cheer. Pollster GfK's forward-looking barometer fell to minus 1.6 points for December, down 2.6 points on the previous month.

"On the one hand, there is the fourth wave of the pandemic with exploding incidence rates, the risk of an overburdened healthcare system and the fear of further restrictions," said GfK consumer expert Rolf Buerkl. "On the other hand, a high inflation rate of around four percent right now is causing consumers' purchasing power to melt away," he said. "This dampens the prospects for the upcoming Christmas business."

Germany has tightened coronavirus curbs to combat the worsening pandemic, including cancelling Christmas markets and barring the unvaccinated from bars, gyms and leisure centers in the hardest-hit regions. The GfK survey of some 2,000 people found that Germans were significantly more pessimistic about the state of the European Union's largest economy than last month. Income expectations also dropped, while the willingness to splash out on big purchases hit a nine-month low, the pollsters said.

Germany lowered its growth estimate for the third quarter yesterday, as clouds gathered over the economy with the coro-

navirus pandemic resurging. The federal data agency said the economy expanded by 1.7 percent in the July to September period compared to the previous quarter, down 0.1 percentage points from a preliminary figure published last month.

"The German economy's recovery continued through the summer," Destatis said in a statement. But growth was decelerating, with the third quarter figure easing from two percent posted in the second quarter. With new curbs imposed again in recent days over record new COVID infections, experts have warned that output in the last three months of the year will be hard hit.

Already, an acute shortage of raw materials was crimping growth in Europe's biggest economy. Germany's Bundesbank is now expecting output to be flat in the fourth quarter. For the full year, the government forecasts that GDP will come in at 2.6 percent rather than the 3.5 percent previously predicted. Germany announced record coronavirus fatalities and infections yesterday as its total death toll passed 100,000, with its most severe virus wave yet breaking just as a new government prepares to take the reins.

Europe's largest economy recorded 351 fatalities in the past 24 hours, bringing the total death toll since the start of the pandemic to 100,119, according to figures from the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) health agency. The weekly incidence rate also hit an all-time high of 419.7 new infections



BERLIN: German shoppers are feeling downbeat as the December Christmas period beckons, a key survey said yesterday.

per 100,000 people, the RKI said.

The escalating health crisis poses an immediate challenge to the new coalition government led by Finance Minister Olaf Scholz, who is set to take over as chancellor from Angela Merkel next month. —AFP

New Huawei nova 9: Trendy flagship and camera king!

KUWAIT: You can finally now lay your hands on the Trendy Flagship & Camera King, the Huawei nova 9. Huawei's latest smartphone comes with an array of splendid features including a stunning design highlighted by an all-new colourway - Colour No 9. A magnificent 50MP Ultra Vision Camera, a large battery with blazing fast charging speeds and of course, with Huawei you can always expect EMUI 12 cool features and Super Device capabilities. Here are all your questions answered about the Trendy-flagship & Camera King!

In terms of design, what is special about the Huawei nova 9?

If you have been searching for a phone that looks as good as it works then the Huawei nova 9 is surely for you. Huawei's Trendy Flagship & Camera King explodes into the scene with a brand-new colourway; Huawei calls this new colour - Colour No 9, there is also a Black version. The low-saturation bluish purple finish is created with a new 'Starry Flash AG Glass' manufacturing process to produce a thrilling effect. The Huawei nova 9 comes with a stunning 6.57-inch Original-Colour Curved 120Hz refresh arte Display with a tapered surface that flows like a waterfall, minimizing the left and right bezels for more immersive viewing. Combined with support for full-path P3 color, the display ensures spectacular viewing experiences with smooth visuals, vivid colors and incredible details. While measuring only 7.77mm in thickness and with an overall weight of 175g, making it perfect for slipping into your handbag or pocket when out and about! In addition, the Huawei nova 9 sports a Star Orbit Ring design at the back,

making the phone recognizable and eye-catching.

How good is the camera setup in the Huawei nova 9?

Dubbed as the Trendy flagship & Camera King, the Huawei nova 9 excels in photography and videography. Armed with a rear camera system which includes a 50MP Ultra Vision Camera, an 8MP Ultra Wide Angle Camera, a 2MP Depth Camera and a Macro Camera that lets you capture at as close as 4cm. Both the front and rear cameras support 4K shooting at 30fps, allowing you to express yourself through short videos and vlogs for social media. The main camera has a large 1/1.56-inch sensor and a RYYB color filter array with a high light sensitivity. This collects 40 percent more light compared to a standard RGGG sensor, ensuring the utmost clarity on all images, while enabling outstanding low light performance

Is it true you can record videos continuously using the rear and front cameras at once?

Yes, that is true. The Huawei nova 9's 32MP front camera is perfect for selfies in addition to its 4K selfie video recording and Portrait Mode which both help your self-portraits pop with Bokeh Portrait. There are also AI Beauty effects and filters you can use. Selfies never looked so slick.

Moreover, introducing an all-new feature - Continuous Front/Rear Recording. With this innovation, you can also switch between the front and rear cameras to fluidly capture stories within a single video file. There is also Dual-View Video recording that allows you to showcase live reaction to events, simultaneously using the front and rear cameras with no editing required or, for when you want to show the big picture and the detail, you can simultaneously capture a close up shot and wide angle shot at the same time.

How long do I need to charge my phone to get a full battery?

What use is a good-looking smartphone with an amazing camera setup if it cannot power you through a day? Whether



for gaming, recording, working or simply browsing the Internet, the Huawei nova 9 delivers excellent battery life with a large and long lasting 4300mAh battery, which is supported by a 66W Huawei SuperCharge. The smartphone can be charged much faster; it only takes 15 minutes to charge to 53 percent and 38 minutes to full 100 percent.

Can I connect my phone with my tablet or my laptop and use the two at once?

Yes you can. The Huawei nova 9 comes with Super Device features and it runs on EMUI 12. You can swipe to open the Control Panel and get quick access to audio playback, Wi-Fi and Bluetooth settings without leaving your current screen, as well as making it easier to control multiple devices as if you were controlling just one device. For example, you can tap on the Huawei MatePad icon to activate Smartphone-Tablet Multi-screen Collaboration; or tap on the Huawei MateBook icon for Smartphone-PC Multi-screen Collaboration or tap on the Huawei FreeBuds icon to seamlessly switch audio output to

Huawei earbuds. With the Distributed File System, the Huawei nova 9 can also function as a wirelessly connected external storage unit for the PC, meaning you can access the files you want more easily than ever before. Using the Huawei nova 9, you can also transfer MeeTime calls onto Huawei Vision smart TV and conduct the call by taking advantage of the larger display, camera and speakers.

Offering a smart and seamless experience, the trusted, innovative and secure AppGallery comes pre-installed on the Huawei nova 9, where users can search for, and download a wide range of high-quality apps.

Modern tech-chic users need a phone with a stylish and stunning design, solid camera setup, supercharging speed, and intriguing cool features making the Huawei nova 9 one of the best choices out there today.

Business

Respite for Biden as US layoff wave ebbs, spending ramps up

Biden steers recovery from pandemic amid soaring inflation

WASHINGTON: Americans are spending their way into the holiday season, while jobless claims have fallen to historic lows, new data showed Wednesday—offering some respite for President Joe Biden as he steers the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic amid soaring inflation.

The raft of surveys paint a picture of a country where companies are increasingly holding on to staff while workers are channeling their paychecks to businesses across the world's largest economy, all while dealing with the uncertainty posed by rapid price increases. In a landmark for the labor market, new filings for jobless benefits last week dropped below their level before the pandemic struck, plunging to a low not hit since 1969, the government said.

Meanwhile, spending and incomes both rose more than expected last month—though prices also increased five percent compared to October 2020, their biggest jump since November 1990.

Biden cheered the employment data, saying in a statement that it signaled a “historic jobs recovery” and that “more Americans are getting back to work, and more Americans have money in their pockets.” Spending and incomes have also climbed above pre-pandemic levels thanks in part to massive spending measures enacted in Washington, Gregory Daco of Oxford Economics said.

“As we look forward to Thanksgiving, there is much to be thankful for in this fiscally-stimulated recovery,” he said in a note, referring to the Thursday holiday. “Still, the recovery process isn’t complete, with spending on services well below its pre-pandemic trend, and the transition from public- to private-driven growth will be delicate.”

‘Quirk’ behind jobless drop

The US economy has come a long way since March 2020, when the beginning of what would become the world's largest COVID-19 outbreak caused more than 20 million people to lose their jobs. Weekly filings for unemployment benefits shot into the millions before leveling off for much of the year. Their retreat to levels nearer those seen before the pandemic only came in 2021, with the release of COVID-19 vaccines.

The latest data from the Labor Department brings the closely watched metric of job market health back below where it was on the week of March 14, 2020 before the layoffs began. But analysts were suspicious. Claims decreased by 71,000 from the week prior and hit a level not seen for generations, which Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics attributed to a “seasonal adjustment quirk” that “will substantially reverse next week.” “That said, the trend in claims is clearly falling,” he wrote in an analysis.

Spending through inflation

Even as the economy has rebounded, Biden has seen his approval ratings fall in recent months, in part due to the spike in inflation. Personal consumption expenditures (PCE) data released by the Commerce Department outlined the extent of last month's increases, with energy prices up 30.2 percent from October 2020 while food prices were 4.8 percent higher. PCE is the preferred inflation gauge of the Federal Reserve, which has pledged to keep its interest rate at zero for longer to maximize employment as the economy recovers. Minutes from the most recent meeting of their policy-setting committee released Wednesday showed some officials worrying the price



WASHINGTON: In this file photo taken on November 11, 2021 a shopper walks past turkeys displayed for sale in a grocery store ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday in Los Angeles, California. —AFP

increases were accelerating, and urged swifter action to end the central bank's stimulus measures.

Despite the inflation wave, the government data showed spending exceeded analysts' forecasts with a 1.3 percent gain, while incomes climbed by a more-than-expected 0.5 percent. The latter was due to increasing wages and gains from assets, the data showed, and undercut by the tapering of government benefit payments, likely due to the expiry of pandemic aid programs.

Consumers directed their spending towards both goods and services, the report said. Much of the

\$123.8 billion increase in goods spending went to motor vehicles and parts, while international travel was a component of the \$90.5 billion increase in services spending that was felt across sectors. Rubeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics said the data were a good omen for overall growth in the last quarter of the year, but warned of “some risk from rising infections and broken supply chains that could be disruptive during the holiday season.” The economy's recovery this year was dented in the third quarter by the Delta wave of COVID-19 infections, which again snarled businesses. —AFP

Chinese city eases rules for developers amid cash crunch

BEIJING: The Chinese city of Chengdu has announced measures to make it easier for developers to sell properties, making it the first to loosen restrictions on the sector that has come under intense pressure following a debt crackdown by Beijing. The announcement comes after several real estate companies—led by industry giant China Evergrande—were plunged into financial crisis in the past year after China embarked on a regulatory drive to bring an end to speculation and leverage.

That left them struggling to meet their debt obligations owing to the fact they could not offload properties or borrow more cash. But on Wednesday, the southwestern city said it would speed up approvals for home sales and property loans, while easing restrictions on the use of pre-sales proceeds. The move makes the capital of Sichuan province the first to address problems developers are facing, as officials face growing pressure to take control of a crisis some fear could hammer the crucial property sector. —AFP

NBK HQ goes orange to support 16 days of activism against gender-based violence campaign

KUWAIT: NBK Headquarters lit up in orange for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, which is on November 25 every year.

The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence is an annual international campaign that kicks off on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and runs until 10 December, Human Rights Day. The global theme for this year's 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, is “Orange the world: End violence against women now!”

General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development (SCPD), in collaboration with Soropritmist International Kuwait, launched the campaign in Kuwait. NBK has a long tradition-supporting social and community oriented activities. This initiative is part of the bank's efforts to achieve the sustainable development goals, which considers women empow-



erment one of the main pillars. It is worth mentioning that NBK was proactive in signing the Women Empowerment Principles (WEPS) on the United Nations website. NBK considers sustainability an integral part of its success. To maximize the impact of its practices, NBK aligned its strategic focus areas with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, Kuwait's National Development Plan and the Global reporting Standards.

It's worth mentioning that Kuwait established the legislation against domestic violence in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goal on gender equality and Kuwait Vision 2030.

Sports

James shines late as Lakers down Pacers in OT, Warriors beat Sixers

LOS ANGELES: Los Angeles superstar LeBron James returned from the first suspension of his NBA career to score 39 points Wednesday and lead the Lakers to a 124-116 overtime victory over the Indiana Pacers. Russell Westbrook added 20 points for the Lakers, who trailed by 12 in the third quarter but rallied despite the absence of ailing star Anthony Davis, who missed the game with flu-like symptoms.

Indiana, led by Malcolm Brogdon's 28 points, were in control for most of the night, with the Lakers taking their first lead of the game at 101-100 on Malik Monk's three-pointer with 4:30 left to play. James then dug in, delivering a pair of free throws, a driving finger-roll layup and a pull-up three-pointer as the Lakers pushed the lead to 110-104 with 1:17 left in regulation.

But the Pacers weren't finished and Dominican Chris Duarte drained an unlikely, off-balance three-pointer at the buzzer to force overtime. A fired-up James scored eight of the Lakers' 12 points in the extra session, draining a pair of three-pointers for the win in his return from a one-game ban as his team fell to the Knicks on Tuesday.

"Just taking what the defense gave me, just trying to get into a rhythm," James said of his late shooting. "I understand that it's closing time, it's winning time, especially in the fourth quarter and overtime. "Chris Duarte made an unbelievable shot to send it to overtime, so (I was) just trying to do my part and had a couple go."

The victory saw the Lakers finish their five-game road trip 2-3. They won in Detroit on Sun-

day when James was ejected after a bloody scuffle with Pistons center Isaiah Stewart. Although the results have been spotty, James said the Lakers "have been playing better of late."

Meanwhile, it was tight in Cleveland, where the Phoenix Suns held off the determined Cavaliers 120-115 to push their winning streak to 14 games. Devin Booker scored 35 points and veteran Chris Paul added 17 with 12 assists for the Suns. Paul made four free throws in the final 8.8 seconds to ensure the Suns kept alive a winning streak that started with a victory over the Cavs on October 30.

It was a close-run thing, however, with Cleveland's Ricky Rubio missing three free throws in the waning seconds that could have turned things the other way. The Suns remained a game behind the Western Conference-leading Golden State Warriors, who turned it up in the second half to beat the Philadelphia 76ers 116-96.

The Warriors shook off a slow start that saw them trail by 19 in the second quarter, chipping away at the lead that Jordan Poole cut to nine points with a spectacular buzzer-beater from beyond the halfcourt logo. Golden State then out-scored the Sixers 34-23 in the third quarter and 30-12 in the fourth to cruise to victory.

Stephen Curry led the Warriors with 25 points-and won the battle of the Curry brothers with one more point than 76ers guard Seth Curry.

Durant milestone

There were comfortable wins for the Brooklyn Nets and reigning champion Milwaukee Bucks. Australian veteran Patty Mills led the Nets with



INDIANAPOLIS: LeBron James #6 of the Los Angeles Lakers shoots the ball against the Indiana Pacers at Gainbridge Fieldhouse on November 24, 2021 in Indianapolis, Indiana. —AFP

23 points, including seven three-pointers, in a 123-104 wire-to-wire victory over the Celtics in Boston. Kevin Durant scored 21 points and passed Allen Iverson to move into the top 25 on the NBA's all-time scoring list. Durant entered the contest with 24,367 points, one behind Iverson, passing him when he drained a jump shot in the opening minutes.

"It's an amazing accomplishment," Durant said.

"Allen Iverson is someone I looked up to, emulated my whole life." In Milwaukee, the Bucks roared to a 14-0 lead against the sluggish Pistons and eased home in a 114-93 victory.

Giannis Antetokounmpo led the Bucks with 33 points and Bobby Portis added 28 as Milwaukee won their fifth straight. In Houston, the Rockets ended a 15-game losing streak, shocking the Chicago Bulls 118-113. —AFP

Kuwait wins silver at bowling doubles world championship

KUWAIT: Kuwait bowling players Iyad Al-Ameeri and Yacoub Al-Shatti won the silver medal at the doubles world championship that was held in Dubai. National team director Nader Al-Mansour said this achievement was made following tremendous effort, good performance and determination to put Kuwait in prominence position in international arenas and lauded the winners and the support of the board of directors headed by Sheikh Talal Al-Mohammad. He also said the coming period will see more work to get the players' technical level higher and qualify them to compete strongly and make more achievements in the near future for Kuwait.



Late Sheikh Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah closing ceremony

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Shooting Sport Club (KSSC) will organize the closing ceremony of the late Sheikh Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah in the presence of Sheikh Mubarak Abdallah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, president of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Eng Duaij Khalaf Al-Otaibi and board members tomorrow (Saturday). Prizes and medals will be distributed to the top three winners in the 10m air rifle and pistol as well as Olympic archery for men and women.

Eng Al-Otaibi said the KSSC is keen on holding this tournament every year due to its importance, and lauded all those who support the sport of shooting. He thanked Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah and his brother Sheikh Mubarak Al-Abdullah for their continued support to KSSC officials.

Al-Otaibi appreciated the participation in the tournament by a large number of club shooters as well as the National Guard, as the numbers reached 70 shooters. Al-Otaibi thanked the club's technical and administrative departments for their tremendous efforts in order to further develop this noble sport, while observing the health protocols to limit the spread of COVID-19.



Eng Duaij Khalaf Al-Otaibi

Sports

Two top-rank players Djokovic, Medvedev headline 2021 Davis Cup

PARIS: Novak Djokovic and Daniil Medvedev, the two top-ranked players in the world, are the main attractions of the Davis Cup which attempts to re-establish itself this week after the cancellation of the 2020 event. The Davis Cup, which began life back in 1900 as a bilateral contest between Britain and the United States, has had numerous makeovers in the past, most recently in 2019 when it was reshaped to resemble a world championships.

This year's event will be played by 18 teams, initially in six groups, over 11 days across three cities. The group stages, which start on Thursday, will be played in Madrid, Turin and Innsbruck where the surge in coronavirus cases and the subsequent lockdown in Austria means that matches will be played once again in an empty arena.

The semi-finals and December 5 final will all be played in the Spanish capital, reward for the team that won the title two years ago. Back then Spain could call on Rafael Nadal. However, this time around the 35-year-old is out of action, recovering from a foot injury that restricted him to a single tournament since losing to Djokovic in the semi-finals of the French Open. The 20-time Major winner is anticipating a return to the courts in Abu Dhabi next month. The holders face a tough battle with Medvedev's Russian team on Sunday if they are to progress from their group to the quarter-finals.

"It's true that we had a big advantage," said Spanish captain Sergi Bruguera. "If you have Nadal in your team you are straight in as favourites because he is the best player in the history of the Davis Cup. "But he's not here, we cannot think about this."

Spain still have three players, including Pablo Carreno Busta, who were a part of the 2019 winning team and in 18-year-old Carlos Alcaraz

they have one of the most exciting young players on the tour. Russian hopes in Group A, which also contains Ecuador, rest on an impressive all-round team.

World number two Medvedev, whose season peaked with a three-set annihilation of Djokovic in the US Open final in September, is backed up by two others in the top 20 — Andrey Rublev (5) and Aslan Karatsev (18) — as well as Olympic silver medallist Karen Khachanov (29). "There are lots of strong teams—Serbia with Novak, Spain, of course, in our group, Italy even without Matteo Berrettini and the USA. But we believe in ourselves," said Khachanov.

Serbia's hopes of replicating their 2010 success will rest largely on the shoulders of Djokovic. However, the world number one looked weary at the ATP Finals in Milan last week when he lost to Alexander Zverev in the semi-finals. The German has chosen not to play in the Davis Cup and he is joined on the sidelines by a host of other big names as 10 of the world's top 15 are absent.

Berrettini (7) is still suffering from the abdominal injury that ruled him out of the ATP Finals. Dominic Thiem (15) is missing for Austria as he continues to recuperate from an injury that wiped the latter part of his season while 2019 finalists Canada will be without the injured Felix Auger-Aliassime (11) as well as Denis Shapovalov (14) who is resting.

And then there are those whose teams did not qualify—Stefanos Tsitsipas (4, Greece), Casper Ruud (8, Norway), Hubert Hurkacz (9, Poland) and Diego Schwartzman (13, Argentina). The 2021 Davis Cup begins on Thursday with Canada taking on Sweden in Group B in Madrid, France up against the Czech Republic in Group C in Innsbruck and Croatia battling it out with 28-time winners Australia in Group D in Turin. —AFP



Novak Djokovic

Rugby eases eligibility rules as Australia, England get WCup boost

LONDON: World Rugby relaxed its international eligibility rules on Wednesday, with the global governing body also announcing England and Australia as its preferred candidates to stage the 2025 and 2027 women's and men's World Cups respectively.

From January 2022, a player will now be able to represent another country after a stand-down period of three years. A player can move to a nation of their birth, of that of their parents' or grandparents', but can only switch allegiance once.

Under current regulations, a player is "locked" to the one country they opt to play for, although there is a loophole that allows nationality transfers should a player turn out in Olympic rugby sevens qualifiers.

World Rugby said the amendment to its eligibility regulations passed by its ruling council will "benefit players and the global competitiveness of rugby".

"We have listened to our membership and players and sought to update the regulation recognising the modern professional rugby environment without compromising the integrity of the international game," said World Rugby chairman Bill Beaumont, a former England captain.

'Boost to competitiveness'

The move has also been backed by the global players' union. "Many players across the world will now benefit from the chance to represent the country of their or their ancestors' birth, serving as a real boost to the competitiveness of emerging nations, which in turn, will benefit the game as a whole," said International Players' Union chief executive Omar Hassanein.

There have long been concerns players from economically

poor Pacific island nations were being denied the chance to represent their birthplace as a result of winning a handful of caps elsewhere while pursuing a more lucrative club career in their adopted nation.

In addition to granting England and Australia preferred candidate status, World Rugby also said they would enter into "exclusive targeted dialogue" with the United States over the hosting of the 2031 men's World Cup — a move which could see the showpiece tournament staged in North America for the first time.

The host for the 2027 World Cup is due to be decided in May by a vote of World Rugby's council. Being favoured by rugby chiefs as the preferred candidate is no guarantee of success — France will stage the 2023 men's World Cup despite an official evaluation report that recommended South Africa should host the tournament.

But with the United States, who had been considering a 2027 bid, now focused on 2031, it now looks as if the men's World Cup could return to Australia for the first time since 2003, when the Wallabies were beaten by England in a dramatic final decided by Jonny Wilkinson's extra-time drop-goal.

Rugby Australia chairman Hamish McLennan, welcoming the decision, said: "This is an exciting opportunity to shape a tournament which will continue the growth of our great game across Australia, the Pacific and globally and showcase our country to the world."

In the women's game, top-ranked England, unbeaten in 18 matches, are now favourites to win next year's Covid-delayed World Cup in New Zealand.

They recently twice thrashed New Zealand, second in the global standings, 43-12 and 56-15 before ending their 2021 campaign with an 89-0 rout of the United States last weekend.

Rugby Football Union chief executive Bill Sweeney said he wanted to deliver the best-attended women's World Cup, including a sell-out final at Twickenham.

"Women's rugby is growing exponentially and securing RWC (Rugby World Cup) 2025 will significantly support our aggressive growth targets for the women's game while further advancing all women's sport," Sweeney said. —AFP

Diamond League 2022 to feature 13 meets, final in Zurich

PARIS: The 2022 Diamond League will be held in 14 cities across four different continents in 2022, organisers announced yesterday. Athletes will compete for points in 13 series meetings from May to September, with the most successful qualifying for the two-day season finale in Zurich. The season opens in Doha on May 13, likely followed by the English city of Birmingham, host of the July 28-August 8 Commonwealth Games, and the American city of Eugene, the venue for the 2022 World Athletics Championships.

The elite series will then head to Rabat on June 5, before returning to Europe for the rest of the month with meetings in Rome, Oslo, Paris and Stockholm. After the July 15-24 world championships, the Diamond League will return to China for the first time since 2019, with the Shanghai meet set for July 30 and a second Chinese meeting scheduled for August 6. August will then see the series head to Monaco and Lausanne before the last series meeting in Brussels on September 2, with the final in Zurich on September 7-8.

Diamond League 2022 calendar

May 13 - Doha
 May 21 - Birmingham/London (tbc)
 May 28 - Eugene, United States
 June 5 - Rabat
 June 9 - Rome
 June 16 - Oslo
 June 18 - Paris
 June 30 - Stockholm
 July 30 - Shanghai, China
 August 6 - Chinese venue to be decided
 August 10 - Monaco
 August 26 - Lausanne
 September 2 - Brussels
 September 7/8 - Zurich. —AFP

Sports

Iyer guides India to solid 258-4 in smoggy NZ Test

KANPUR, India: Shreyas Iyer's unbeaten 75 on debut steadied India after an afternoon wobble to end the opening day of the first Test looking comfortable at 258-4. Iyer shared an unfinished 113-run partnership with all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja who made a busy 50 off 100 balls, in the heavily polluted industrial city of Kanpur.

Iyer, the last specialist batsman in the order before bowling all-rounders and the wicketkeeper, hit 7 fours and two sixes in his 136-ball innings. His partner at the other end, Jadeja, hit six fours. Iyer came in after Cheteshwar Pujara's dismissal for 26 off 88 balls to Tim Southee left India at 106-3.

India's stand-in captain Ajinkya Rahane built a 39-run partnership with Iyer before becoming Kyle Jamieson's third scalp to leave India at 154-4 at tea. Jamieson, the sharpest of the New Zealand bowlers, had earlier removed India's new opening pair of Mayank Agarwal and Shubman Gill in his 15.2 overs spell giving away only 47 runs and taking three wickets.

"(I) hardly played the last couple of months. Was nice to find some rhythm. Probably too good at times, hence the overstepping," Jamieson said. "Hopefully the new ball swings a bit in the morning and we can take a few wickets. India is probably a fraction ahead, but we did well to have them four down."

Gill falls after lunch

Gill, who looked promising at unbeaten 52 off

93 balls going into lunch, could not add to the score and was bowled by Jamieson in the first over after the break. He hit five fours and a six in his free-flowing innings and was Jamieson's second, after Agarwal who edged him to wicketkeeper Tom Blundell in the eighth over after a scratchy 13 runs off 28 balls.

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson re-introduced Tim Southee in the 38th over of the innings and the veteran removed a well-set Pujara off his fourth ball. Williamson took the second new ball when it became available at the end of the 80th over but Jadeja and Iyer comfortably navigated the four overs before play was called off for bad light.

The hosts dominated the final session of the game and will now hope to bat the Kiwis out of the game Friday before the pitch becomes more conducive to the spinners. India were without a rested Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli and an injured KL Rahul.

The World Test Championship holders picked two specialist spinners—Ajaz Patel and William Somerville—and spinning all-rounder Rachin Ravindra for Kanpur. Patel bowled his left-arm spin for 21 wicketless overs that cost 78 runs.

Off-spinner Somerville was introduced in the 18th over and bowled a tidy 24-over spell for 60 runs. The 22-year-old Ravindra, the other debutant in the match, got to bowl for the first time in the 25th over with the ball already gripping and



KANPUR: India's Shreyas Iyer (R) plays a shot during the first Test cricket match between India and New Zealand at the Green Park Stadium in Kanpur yesterday. —AFP

turning on the slow first-day pitch, but failed to take a wicket.

Rahane too packed his side with three specialist spinners in Jadeja, Ravichandran Ashwin and Axar Patel. Pollution cast a hazy pall over

the ground, with levels of the most harmful PM2.5 microparticles reaching more than 19 times the World Health Organization's recommended daily maximum, according to monitoring company IQAir. —AFP

Embuldeniya stars as S Lanka thrash West Indies

GALLE, Sri Lanka: Lasith Embuldeniya took five wickets in the final innings as hosts Sri Lanka thrashed the West Indies by 187 runs in the first Test yesterday to surge 1-0 up in the two-match series. Chasing a hefty target of 348, West Indies were bowled out for 160 before tea on the final day, with Nkrumah Bonner the lone warrior with an unbeaten 68 on a turning wicket at Galle International Stadium.

Bonner was one of only three West Indies batsmen to make it into double figures in their second innings, along with Joshua Da Silva, who made 54, and Rahkeem Cornwall who managed 13. Sri Lanka secured a 156-run first-innings lead thanks to a masterful 147 by Dimuth Karunaratne and four wickets by Praveen Jayawickrama helping to scuttle the visitors for 230.

With rain washing out some play and storm clouds threatening, Karunaratne starred again in Sri Lanka's second innings with 83, aided by Angelo Mathews who made 69, to set the West Indies a mountainous task to win.

"I was worried leading into the Test match," Karunaratne said. "But something told me that if I get a good start, I will do well," the skipper added. "It was a nervous start but I gained confidence the

more I batted." On day four the hosts' spin trio made quick work of the West Indies top order with a collapse seeing the tourists lose four wickets in 15 balls for just four runs.

Reeling on 52 for six at the start of the final day, the West Indies clung on with Bonner and Da Silva putting on 100, the West Indies' highest partnership of the match. Despite the wicket offering plenty of assistance, the two batsmen tackled the Sri Lankan spin threat well with clever use of footwork.

Three chances were also put down by Sri Lanka with Pathum Nissanka the guilty party each time. It was a crucial seventh-wicket partnership for the tourists after they had been reduced to 18 for six on day four.

Playing catch-up

At that point, the West Indies were in danger of being shot out for their lowest score in Test cricket with the game ending inside four days. Their lowest total was 47 all out against England in Jamaica in 2004. "The first innings total is always important. We did not do well and were under pressure from that point onwards," said West Indies captain Kraigg Brathwaite.

"It is difficult to play catch-up in Test cricket... We need to have clarity on our batting. Not just big shots, but we have to defend confidently too." Sri Lanka dismissed Da Silva 15 minutes before lunch when he was caught at slip by Dhananjaya de Silva to give Embuldeniya his third wicket in the innings. Da Silva's 54 came off 129 balls and contained five fours. — AFP

Mominul tells Bangladesh to 'close ears' ahead of Pakistan Tests

CHITTAGONG, Bangladesh: Bangladesh captain Mominul Haque urged his teammates to ignore criticism and concentrate on the job at hand ahead of the Test series at home against Pakistan beginning today. The hosts kick off the new Test Championship cycle with the two-match series against Pakistan starting in Chittagong, having never beaten the visitors either at home or away.

The series follows a dismal run in Twenty20 internationals, with Bangladesh losing eight consecutive matches. Five losses at the World Cup were followed by a three-nil whitewash at home by semi-finalists Pakistan. "This is not the first time Bangladesh have gone through such a phase. We have overcome such times before too," said Test captain Mominul, who was not part of Twenty20 side.

"People got mentally weak... because they pay attention to what is being said. My job is to bring back focus. You cannot stop anyone from talking. So it's better to keep your ears closed," he said yesterday. Adding to their

woes, star player Shakib Al Hasan, batsman Tamim Iqbal and an in-form all-rounder Taskin Ahmed, will all miss the first Test due to injury. Mominul said it would be a "challenge" to lead a young Bangladesh side against a strong Pakistan team. "We have always required senior players in the Test side," he said. "But it is a continuous process. We have to move on. We cannot be disappointed all the time. I firmly believe it is a huge opportunity for the younger players," he said.

Babar cautious

Pakistan captain Babar Azam insisted his team will not take the hosts lightly in their home conditions. "This looks a typical Bangladeshi pitch which will help spinners. So, we are aware of the conditions," he said. Pakistan announced their 12-man squad for the opening Test, which included uncapped batsman Abdullah Shafique.

Faheem Ashraf, Fawad Alam and Imam-ul-Haq also made the 12-man squad. "I cannot score runs all the time, so other batsmen will have to take responsibility. This is an important WTC Tests, so we need to be at our best," Babar said. Pakistan have played 10 Tests against Bangladesh, winning nine.

The only draw came in 2015 when Tamim scored a maiden Test double hundred in a record 312-run opening stand with Imrul Kayes in the second innings in Bangladesh's southern city of Khulna. The second Test will start in Dhaka on December 4. — AFP

Sports

Thiago ends drought as Liverpool down Porto

LIVERPOOL: Jurgen Klopp saluted Liverpool's understudies after they dented Porto's bid to qualify for the Champions League last 16 as Thiago Alcantara's first goal since May inspired a 2-0 win on Wednesday. Klopp's side had already booked their place in the knockout stages as Group B winners, but they did not rest on their laurels at Anfield.

Thiago has endured a difficult time with Liverpool, struggling to recapture the form that made him a Champions League winner at Bayern Munich. The Spanish midfielder gave a glimpse of his talent with a composed display capped by a blistering long-range strike to put Liverpool ahead in the second half.

Mohamed Salah sealed Liverpool's fifth successive group victory with his 17th goal this season. Porto are second in the group, one point ahead of Atletico Madrid and AC Milan, leaving Sergio Conceicao's team needing to beat the Spanish champions in their last match on December 7 to advance alongside Liverpool.

The Reds do not have an empty midweek left in 2021 and face nine games in all competitions in December, so Klopp rested several stars including Virgil Van Dijk, Andrew Robertson, Fabinho and Trent Alexander-Arnold.

"It was good. Some people might have thought we would play an easy game but we were not here for that. We won the game with two exceptional goals, especially Thiago's. Wow!" Klopp said. "It was hectic, which is not unusual for a team that has not played together a lot. But so many good things happened, both individually and as a team."

"We had young players playing, players back from injury and the right players got minutes and the right players got some rest." Liverpool's 19-year-old midfielder Tyler Morton made his Champions League debut, with Neco Williams, Ibrahima Konate and Takumi Minamino also coming in.

Morton made his first Premier League appearance as a late substitute against Arsenal at the weekend, but he did not look out of place on the big stage. "If you are in our squad you are a good player, it's as simple as that. I would not throw a player into a game if he was not ready," Klopp said.

"With Tyler some might have been surprised before kick off but he did exceptionally well and I am pleased he put in a performance like this."

Thiago magic

Porto were inches away from taking the lead when Otavio robbed Kostas Tsimikas and whipped a cross towards Mehdi Taremi, whose header hit Joel Matip and deflected just wide. Moments later, Luis Diaz's deft pass picked out Otavio's run into the Liverpool area, but Tsimikas made a lunging last-ditch tackle that forced the midfielder to poke wide.

Sadio Mane thought he had scored in the 37th minute when he ran onto Thiago's pass and slotted home, but a VAR check showed the Senegal forward was marginally offside. When Mateus Uribe swivelled to fire just wide soon after half-time, it seemed Porto were beginning to take control.

But it was Klopp's men who made the break-



LIVERPOOL, England: Liverpool's English midfielder Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain (2R) controls the ball during the UEFA Champions League group B football match between Liverpool and Porto at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England. — AFP

through thanks to Thiago's moment of magic in the 52nd minute. Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain's free-kick was headed out to Thiago and he drilled a superb 25-yard drive past Diogo Costa. Oxlade-Chamberlain went close with a long-range rocket before Thiago was substituted to a

standing ovation from the Kop.

Thiago's replacement Jordan Henderson set up Liverpool's second goal in the 70th minute, picking out Salah, who shimmied inside before planting a low strike into the bottom corner from 12 yards. — AFP

Below-strength SA seek breathing room from one-day series

CENTURION: A below-strength South African team will be seeking a clean sweep when they play the Netherlands in a three-match one-day international series starting at SuperSport Park today. The series forms part of the International Cricket Council's World Cup Super League which is a qualifying tournament for the 2023 Cricket World Cup.

Hosts India and the best-placed seven other teams will qualify automatically for the World Cup, with the remaining five teams in the Super League having to play in a ten-team qualifying tournament to fill the other two places in India. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has caused an imbalance in the number of fixtures played in the league, South Africa are currently in ninth place, outside the automatic qualifying places.

Victory against the Netherlands and in a home series against Bangladesh in March will give the Proteas some breathing space in their qualifying bid, with potentially difficult series against India, Australia and England to come.

South Africa have taken a minor gamble by resting six key players, including regular white-ball captain Temba Bavuma, ahead of a Test series against India next month. They were further weakened on Wednesday when Cricket South Africa announced that fast bowler Lungi Ngidi had been withdrawn from the squad after testing positive for Covid while fellow pacesman Lizaad Williams was injured. — AFP

Goncalves fires Sporting into last 16, Dortmund bow out

LISBON: Pedro Goncalves netted twice as Sporting Lisbon beat ten-man Borussia Dortmund 3-1 on Wednesday to reach the Champions League's last 16 and end the Germans' hopes of advancing to the knock-out stages.

Sporting got the two-goal winning margin they needed to reach the last 16 for the first time since the 2008-2009 season behind Group C winners Ajax.

The away defeat means the best third-placed Dortmund can now hope for is the knock-out stages of the Europa League. The Germans were weakened by the continuing absence of forward Erling Braut Haaland.

Sporting winger Goncalves, who also scored twice in the 4-0 thrashing of Besiktas, could have finished with a hat-trick but his late penalty was saved only for Pedro Porro to head in the rebound.

Porro had the last laugh having been kicked by Dortmund's second-half replacement Emre Can, who was sent off for the foul with 16 minutes left after tempers flared.

Dortmund's Dutch striker Donyell Malen gave the visitors brief hope with a consolation goal in stoppage time.

It was a bitter night for the Germans, who have lost three consecutive Champions League games for the first time.

Already missing Haaland, sidelined by a long-term hip injury, Dortmund were also without key defender Mats Hummels, suspended after being sent off in the 3-1 home defeat to Ajax. Dortmund lost Raphael Guerreiro to injury in the warm-up and his place at left-back was filled by Nico Schulz, who played an unfortunate part in the opening goal.

With half an hour gone, Schulz completely misjudged a long-ball which bounced into the path of Goncalves, who drilled his shot past Dortmund goalkeeper Gregor Kobel to fire Sporting ahead.

The hosts doubled their lead six minutes from the break when Dortmund defender Manuel Akanji cleared the ball only as far as Goncalves who hit the back of the net from the edge of the area. Dortmund could have gone into the break level, instead of 2-0 down as Malen hit the post, then had a shot cleared off the line. Can replaced the hapless Schulz at half-time.

Pressure by the visitors led to Sporting defender Feddal poking the ball into his own goal, only for Dortmund defender Thomas Meunier to be flagged for offside.

Dortmund's hopes faded after Can was shown a straight red for fouling Porro, while centre-back Dan-Axel Zagadou was also booked for his part in the resulting pushing and shoving. Zagadou then gave away a penalty when the VAR spotted he had kicked Sporting striker Paulinho.

Although Kobel denied Goncalves a hat-trick by saving the initial spot-kick, Porro was on hand to head the blocked shot into the net to make it 3-0 with nine minutes left. Malen's consolation came after Dortmund captain Marco Reus beat the defence, but it was too late. — AFP

Sports

Manchester City take top spot, PSG through despite defeat

MANCHESTER: Manchester City came from behind to secure top spot in Group A with a 2-1 win over Paris Saint-Germain as both sides qualified for the Champions League last 16 on Wednesday. Kylian Mbappe put the French giants in front against the run of play five minutes into the second half.

But PSG run the risk of being drawn against the likes of Bayern Munich, Chelsea or Liverpool in the last 16 after Raheem Sterling and Gabriel Jesus turned the game around for the English champions. PSG boss Mauricio Pochettino had to fend off questions in his pre-match press conference over whether he may be making a permanent move to Manchester to take over the vacant managerial role at United.

The Argentine's first year in the French capital has been far from plain sailing despite a 11-point lead at the top of Ligue 1. Lionel Messi's arrival to form a fearsome front three alongside Mbappe and Neymar has heaped expectation upon Pochettino to deliver a first Champions League crown to Paris.

The blessing and curse of that richly-talented trio was in evidence as the visitors were largely overrun but suddenly clicked to create the opening goal. City's collective cohesion had the better of the

clash of styles, but lacked the clinical edge offered by PSG's Galacticos.

Presnel Kimpembe cleared Rodri's goalbound header off the line before Achraf Hakimi did likewise to turn Riyad Mahrez's shot that was destined for the top corner over the bar. Despite missing the midfield trio of Kevin De Bruyne, Jack Grealish and Phil Foden, City were still creating chances at will as Messi, Neymar and Mbappe did little to help their teammates defend. Ilkay Gundogan had the hosts' best chance before the break, but his curling effort came crashing back off the post. Mbappe wasted the one opportunity PSG did muster in the first half as he pounced on a John Stones mistake, but fired over.

The Frenchman was not so wasteful five minutes after the break as he drilled low through Ederson's legs from Messi's deflected cross. But the pattern of the game remained unchanged as City charged forward and finally found a way through.

Kyle Walker's cross escaped Jesus, but rolled kindly for Sterling to prod in just his fourth goal of the season at the back post. Kaylor Navas then produced a stunning finger-tip save to deny Jesus.

Pochettino responded by introducing Angel Di Maria to add to his attacking



MANCHESTER: Manchester City's Brazilian goalkeeper Ederson (centre right) catches the ball during the UEFA Champions League Group A football match between Manchester City and Paris Saint-Germain at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, north west England. —AFP

trident and he teed up Neymar with a great chance to restore PSG's lead, only for the Brazilian to slot wide with just his international teammate Ederson to beat.

Moments later another slick team move from City created a deserved winner. Mahrez's cross to the back post picked out Bernardo Silva, who noncha-

lantly turned the ball back into the path of Jesus to calmly slot home.

Victory gives City an unassailable four-point lead at the top of the section with just one game to go. But RB Leipzig's 5-0 thrashing of Club Brugge means PSG are also guaranteed to go through in second place. —AFP

Late Milan winner stuns Atletico

MADRID: Atletico Madrid's chances of reaching the Champions League last 16 were dealt a hammer blow on Wednesday after a 1-0 defeat by AC Milan left them needing to win at Porto in their final game in Group B. A scrappy contest at the Wanda Metropolitano looked set to end goalless until Milan substitute Junior Messias headed home a dramatic winner in the 87th minute to leave Atletico staring down the barrel of an early exit. Messias' goal not only means Atleti will need a victory instead of a draw in Porto on December 7 but it also brings Milan back to life, as they sit just a point behind Porto ahead of their closing match against Liverpool at the San Siro. Atletico Madrid are level on points with Milan but beneath them on goal difference, with qualification even to the Europa League now far from certain.

All but two of Atleti's previous 11 Champions League group appearances have seen them reach the last 16 while Milan are participating at this stage for the first time since 2014. But Milan deserved their late winner, after showing far more ambition in a game that Atleti contributed very little to in any creative sense. Both teams came in without the assurance of recent victories, with Milan, second in Serie A, losing to Fiorentina last weekend on the back of a draw against Inter. Atletico sit fourth in La Liga and have endured a mixed start to the season, from which the biggest doubts have arisen around an increasingly leaky defence. —AFP

Benzema scores as Real Madrid beat Sheriff to reach last

TIRASPOL: Karim Benzema scored just hours after being found guilty by a French court in a blackmail case as Real Madrid saw off Sheriff Tiraspol 3-0 on Wednesday to reach the Champions League knockout stage. The France striker notched his team's third goal of a confident display in Transnistria, as Real exacted revenge for their shock 2-1 loss to Sheriff in Madrid earlier this season.

The victory sends the Spanish giants back to the top of Group D, two points clear of second-placed Inter Milan, who also qualified for the last 16 after beating Shakhtar Donetsk 2-0. Madrid now only need to avoid defeat in their final group game against Inter at the Santiago Bernabeu to finish first in the group.

"We continue along the right path. I like the way we're playing," said Real coach Carlo Ancelotti, whose side beat Inter 1-0 in their first group game in September. "The squad is in good shape, everyone is strong physically. It's important for us to finish top and we'll be looking to end our group campaign the way we've begun it."

The defeat ends Sheriff's hopes of progressing, but a memorable debut Champions League campaign has already secured third place and a spot in the Europa League knockout phase. Benzema, who was given a one-year suspended sentence for complicity in a bid to blackmail his former France team-mate Mathieu Valbuena on Wednesday, had an early effort ruled out for offside.

Alaba strikes

Madrid were dominant but struggled to find a way through, with Rodrygo shooting tamely at home goalkeeper Giorgos Athanasiadis in the 18th minute. But the away side did forge ahead on the half-hour mark through David Alaba.

The Austrian defender's free-kick was deflected by the Sheriff wall and past the helpless Athanasiadis. The hosts were struggling to get out of their own half and Dani Carvajal almost added a second for Real when he volleyed narrowly over the crossbar.

The 13-time European champions did double their advantage in first-half stoppage time, though, as a fantastic move was ended by Toni Kroos' first-time shot which flew in off the crossbar and was awarded by goalline technology.

Benzema got his goal in the 55th minute, finding space on the edge of the box and drilling the ball into the bottom corner to score for the 15th time this season. It was also the 76th goal of the striker's Champions League career.

There was a worry for Real as Alaba hobbled off in the 65th minute to be replaced by Nacho, but Ancelotti said it was not a serious injury.

"We took Alaba off because he twisted his ankle slightly, but I really don't think it's a bad problem," added the Italian. "We are pretty confident that he'll be ready for the upcoming games."

Sheriff had scored in each of their first four group games and had a flurry of chances midway through the second half, with Real goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois making two saves and a cross hitting the post. But it was ultimately a comfortable outing for Madrid as they made the knockouts for a 25th consecutive year. —AFP

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FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2021



James shines late as Lakers down Pacers in OT, Warriors beat Sixers

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